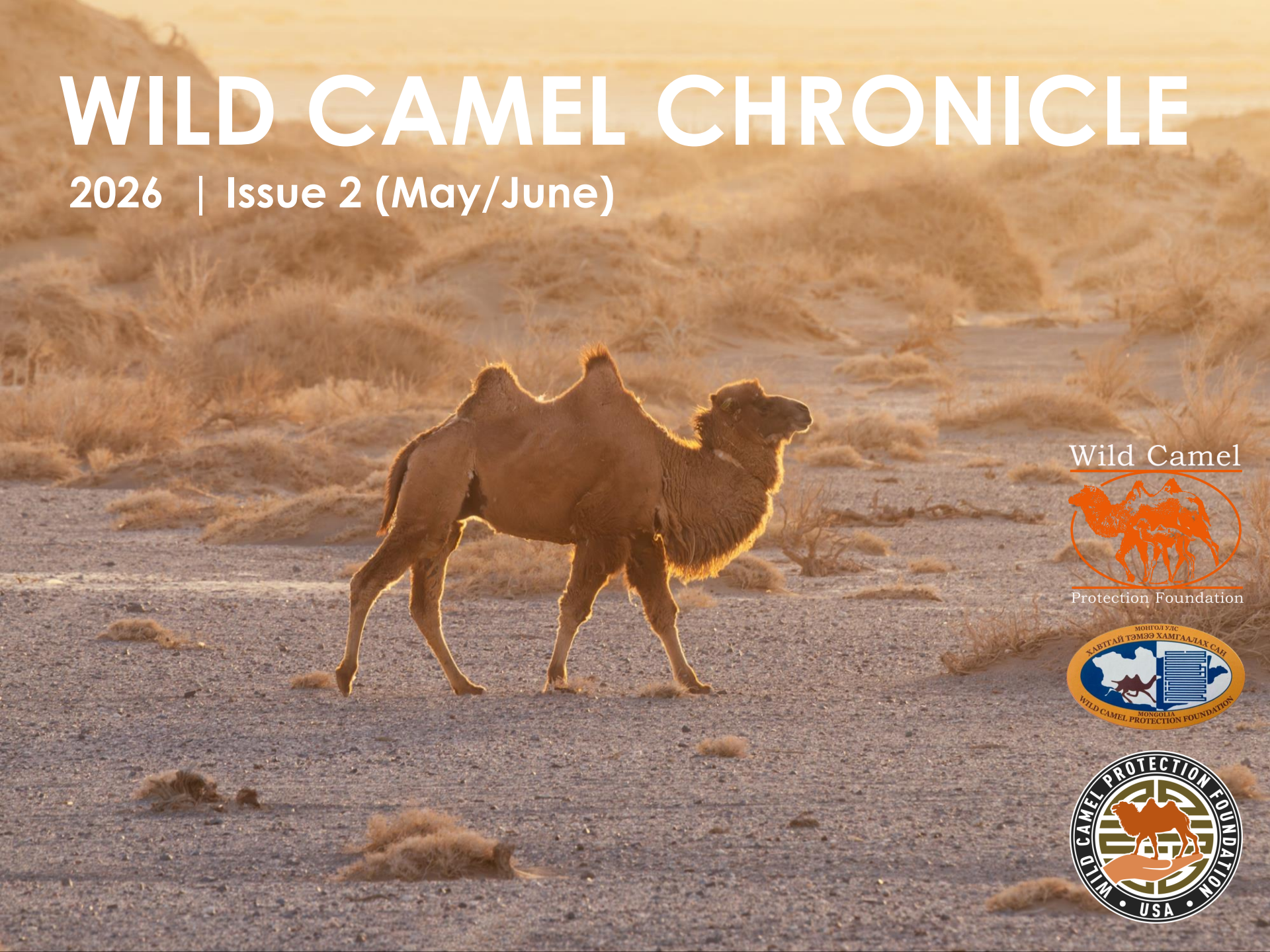
WILD CAMEL CHRONICLE

2026 | Issue 2 (May/June)



ORGANIZATION PROFILE

Wild Camel Protection Foundation USA Inc.
501(c)(3) non-profit organization registered in New Jersey, USA
EIN: 41-4015604

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Cover image: Sunset at the Wild Camel Breeding and Research Center in Toli Bulag, deep in the Gobi Desert of Mongolia – the home to the world's only captive breeding program for the endangered Wild Camel. Photographed by Dr. Kah-Wai Lin in April 2025.

Wild Camel (*Camelus ferus*) is one of the rarest species on Earth, with ~1,000 individuals remaining in the wild, found only in the Gobi Desert of Mongolia and China. There are currently around 40 Wild Camels in breeding centers in Mongolia, and 0 in zoos anywhere in the world.

Wild Camel Protection Foundation USA (WCPF USA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established in New Jersey, United States, working in close partnership with **Wild Camel Protection Foundation UK** (est. 1997) and **Wild Camel Protection Foundation Mongolia** (est. 2001), creating an international alliance dedicated to the conservation, research, education of the endangered Wild Camel and the operation of two **Wild Camel Breeding & Research Centers** in Mongolia.

Wild Camel Protection Foundation

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WILD CAMEL PROTECTION FOUNDATION USA

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Field Works in Gobi Desert of Mongolia

April 22 – May 16, 2026

From April 22 to May 16, 2026, a team from the Wild Camel Protection Foundation (WCPF) undertook an extensive field expedition across the Gobi Desert of Mongolia. The expedition brought together Dr. Adiya Yadamsuren and Odonkhuu Daria from WCPF, Professor Pamela Burger, veterinarian Dr. Jen Quayle and Alex from Knowsley Safari, Ph.D. student Tsend-Ayush and Senior Herder Tsog-Erdene Gawlii to advance ongoing conservation and scientific research efforts on Wild Camel.

The expedition covered a vast region of the Mongolian Gobi, with the team traveling from Ulaanbaatar through Bayanhongor, Bayantooroi, Zakhyn Us, Altai Soum, Bayan-Ondor, and Toli Bulag. Working closely with local government officials, herders, veterinarians, researchers, and protected area staff, the team conducted a wide range of activities related to Wild Camel conservation, breeding center management, hybrid camel research, GPS collaring, veterinary care, and community engagement.

A key objective of the expedition was to strengthen cooperation with local authorities and communities surrounding the Wild Camel breeding centers. Meetings were held with provincial environmental departments and local officials to discuss the development and long-term management of the Toli Bulag Wild Camel Breeding and Research Center, risk management strategies, and conservation activities within the buffer zones of the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area. Community engagement sessions and questionnaire surveys were also conducted to better understand local perspectives on wildlife conservation, livestock management, and sustainable resource use.

At the Zakhyn Us and Toli Bulag breeding centers, the team carried out extensive veterinary and scientific work on captive Wild Camels. Activities included GPS collar deployment and battery replacement, collection of blood, tissue, hair, and tick samples, and ear tagging of newborn calves.

Several Wild Camel calves born during 2025 and 2026 were documented and sampled as part of ongoing genetic, health, and population monitoring programs. These efforts provide valuable information for understanding the long-term viability and management of one of the world's rarest large mammals.


Hybrid camel

Another major component of the expedition focused on hybrid camel research in communities surrounding the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area. The team interviewed herders and non-herders, collected hair samples from hybrid camels, documented livestock management practices, and examined human-wildlife interactions and local livelihoods. Discussions with local residents covered a wide range of topics, including camel milk production, wolf predation on livestock, seasonal migration patterns, water availability, and the challenges of living in one of the world's most remote and demanding desert environments.

Following the field expedition, the team returned to Ulaanbaatar to continue laboratory analyses and scientific discussions at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. Data and biological samples collected during the mission will contribute to ongoing studies on Wild Camel genetics, hybridization, disease monitoring, ecology, and conservation management.

The expedition concluded successfully, marking another important milestone in the long-term effort to conserve the Wild Camel, a unique species found only in the deserts of Mongolia and China. WCPF extends its sincere appreciation to all team members, local partners, government agencies, protected area staff, veterinarians, researchers, and community members whose support and dedication made this important mission possible.

Why Hybrid Camel Matters?

Hybridization between Wild Camel (*Camelus ferus*) and domestic Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*) has become one of the most important conservation challenges facing Wild Camel populations in Mongolia and China today. Although the Wild Camel survives only in the remote Gobi Desert, increasing contact between wild and domestic camels in buffer zones surrounding protected areas has created growing concern among conservationists and genetic researchers.

For many years, local herders in parts of the Gobi have intentionally crossed domestic Bactrian camels with Wild Camels. First-generation hybrids are often considered stronger, faster, and more resilient than domestic camels alone, and are sometimes used for racing or heavy work. However, while hybrid camels may offer short-term economic benefits for herders, uncontrolled hybridization poses a serious long-term threat to the genetic integrity of the Wild Camel population.

Modern genetic research has clearly demonstrated that the Wild Camel is not simply a feral domestic camel, but a genetically distinct species that diverged from the domestic Bactrian camel hundreds of thousands of years ago. Research led by Professor Pamela Burger and collaborators showed high levels of genetic differentiation between Wild Camels and domestic Bactrian camels, confirming that Camelus ferus is a separate species in its own right.

Recent research led by Anna M. Jemmett and collaborators (see next section) further highlighted the conservation significance of hybridization in Wild Camels. The study found evidence of both historic and ongoing introgression from domestic Bactrian camels into the Wild Camel population. The research detected nuclear introgression in approximately 10–22% of sampled Wild Camels in Mongolia, indicating that hybridization may be more widespread than previously understood.

Hybridization can gradually dilute the unique genetic identity of the Wild Camel population. Unlike many endangered species that have large captive populations in zoos worldwide, the Wild Camel has no zoo population anywhere on Earth. The global population remains extremely small and fragmented, making the preservation of genetic purity critically important for the species' long-term survival.

The issue of hybridization is closely tied to broader conservation challenges in the Gobi Desert. Climate change, water scarcity, mining development, habitat fragmentation, and increasing livestock pressure all force Wild Camels into closer proximity with domestic animals. This increases not only the risk of hybridization, but also the spread of diseases and parasites between wild and domestic populations.

Conservationists emphasize that protecting the Wild Camel requires more than simply conserving animals within protected areas. Long-term success depends on close collaboration with local communities, improved management of livestock in buffer zones, continued genetic monitoring, and international scientific cooperation.

Scientific Insights: Hybrid Camels and Conservation Challenge

This article summarizes a recent scientific study published in the journal Ecology and Evolution by Anna Jemmett and colleagues (Anna M. Jemmett, John G. Ewen, Adiya Yadamsuren, Deborah A. Dawson, Lucy Raggett, Pamela A. Burger, Jim. J. Groombridge. Challenges of Introgression in Conservation: Genetic Diversity of the Endangered Wild Camel (Camelus ferus) in Mongolia. Ecology and Evolution. 2026; 16(4): e73293). https://doi.org/10.1002/ece3.73293

In a recent study by Anna Jemmett and colleagues, scientists analyzed DNA from more than 250 Wild Camels across Mongolia, using non-invasive samples such as hair and feces collected in the wild. What they discovered was surprising: a significant portion of Wild Camels carries genetic material from domestic Bactrian camels. This process, known as **introgression**, occurs when wild and domestic animals interbreed. The study found that roughly **10% to 22%** of Wild Camels show evidence of this genetic mixing. In many cases, the mixing appears to be driven more by male domestic camels breeding with wild females.

At first glance, this may seem like a natural process, after all, many species interbreed. But for an endangered animal like the Wild Camel, the consequences can be serious. Wild Camels are NOT simply a feral version of domestic camels. They are a distinct species, having evolved separately for hundreds of thousands of years. Their unique genetic identity is part of what conservation efforts aim to protect. If hybridization becomes widespread, there is a real risk that this identity could be diluted or even lost entirely over time.

A conservation paradox

However, the study also highlights a dilemma. The Wild Camel population is extremely small and shows signs of low genetic diversity and inbreeding, factors that can weaken a species and make it more vulnerable to disease, environmental change, and reproductive problems.

In this context, some level of genetic mixing might actually help by introducing new genetic variation into the population.

This creates a difficult balancing act for conservationists:

- Too much hybridization could erase the species
- Too little genetic diversity could lead to its decline

There is no simple answer.

Human activity at the center

The root cause of this issue lies largely in human activity. Domestic camels, herded by local communities, often share the same fragile desert ecosystem as Wild Camels.

As resources like water become scarcer due to climate change, the chances of interaction, and interbreeding, increase. This means that conservation is not just about protecting wild animals, but also about managing how humans and livestock coexist with them.

What this mean for conservation

The findings suggest that protecting the Wild Camel will require more than traditional conservation methods. It will involve:

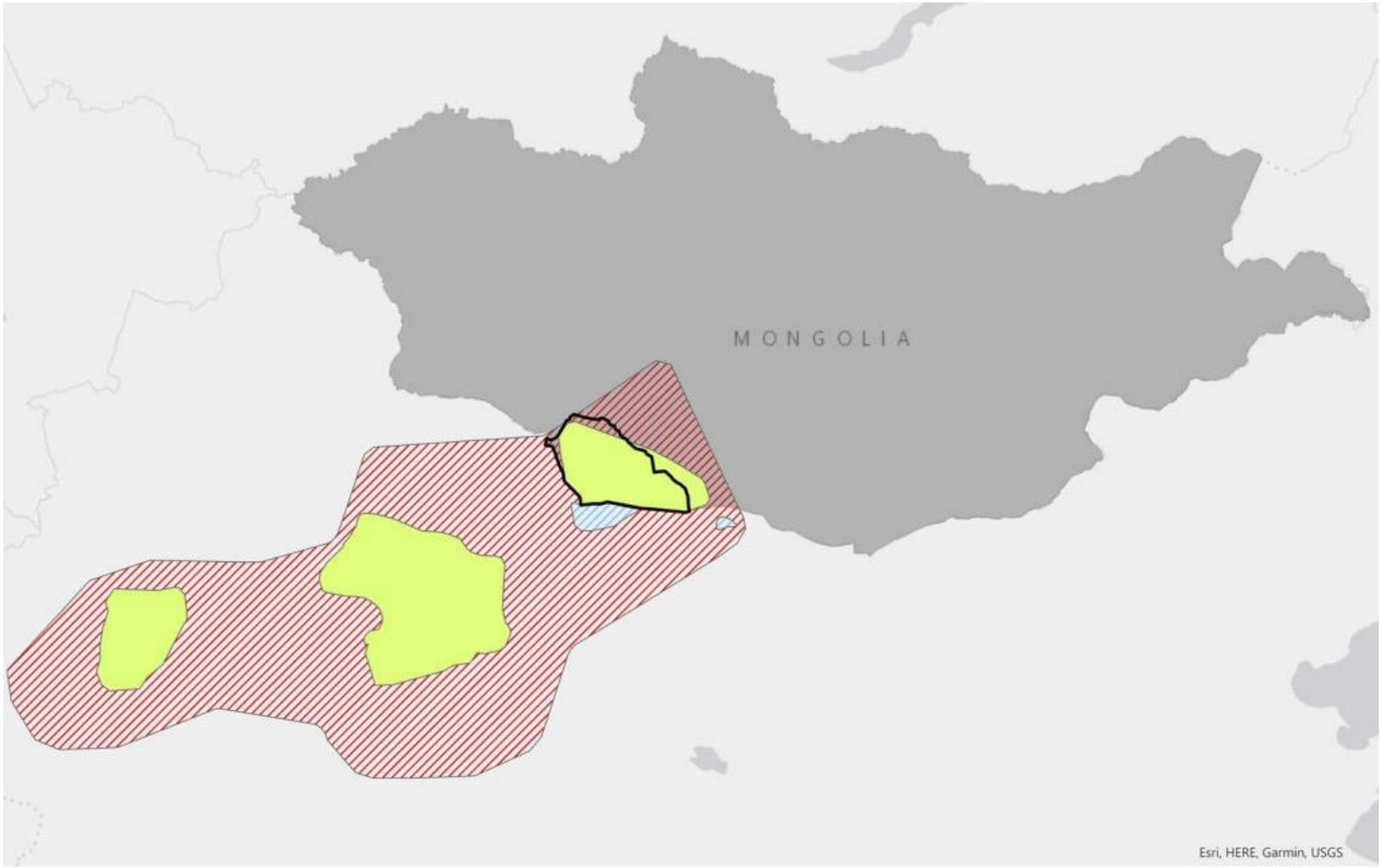
- Monitoring genetic purity and diversity
- Managing contact between wild and domestic camels
- Carefully considering how breeding programs are designed
- Balancing ecological realities with long-term species identity

A new way of thinking

This study challenges a common assumption in conservation, that saving a species simply means keeping it “pure.” In reality, survival may depend on navigating complex genetic and ecological trade-offs. For the Wild Camel, one of the most elusive animals on Earth, the question is no longer just how to protect it, but what exactly we are trying to preserve.

The road ahead

The Wild Camel has survived extreme environments for thousands of years. But in today’s rapidly changing world, its greatest challenge may come not from nature, but from the subtle and unintended consequences of human presence. Understanding its genetics is now a key part of ensuring that this ancient species continues to exist, not just in name, but in its true wild form.



Wild Camel (C. ferus) range. Extant/resident (Green), Extinct (red) and possibly extinct (blue). Extent of the Great Gobi A Strictly Protected Area is outlined in black. Range update May 2025 IUCN Redlist (From Figure 1, Jemmett et al. Ecology and Evolution. 2026).

PARDICOLOR: OUR EXHIBITION PARTNER

PARDICOLOR (named after *Prionodon pardicolor* - the spotted linsang found across Asia), is a creative initiative empowering artists and communities around the world to create powerful art that helps protect endangered wildlife and habitats.

The Creative Arts Fund runs on a yearly basis and offers small grants (up to $500) to artists around the world, working on creative projects on wildlife, environment, biodiversity and society. To date, they have sponsored 47 projects, which have resulted in 30 collaborations with Indigenous groups or communities, 15 collaborations with non-profits working in the environmental sector, and 33 exhibitions raising awareness on a huge variety of wildlife and urgent conservation issues.

One such grant supported grantee Patience Ogada, from Nigeria, who used her small grant to host creative workshops and a live spoken word and poetry event to spark environmental awareness and conversation in her home town. Of the power of the small grant, Patience said, "My project was more than just an experience, it was a milestone in my pursuit of climate justice. It stretched my mental and creative abilities, and drew me closer to my environment." Learn more about the fund and see PARDICOLOR's global map of artists **here**.

Wild Camel Protection Foundation USA extends its heartfelt thanks to PARDICOLOR for supporting our conservation art initiatives and contributing to the art exhibition at the Embassy of Mongolia in Washington, D.C., in April 2026.

PARDICOLOR: OUR EXHIBITION PARTNER

Demelza and Tabitha Stokes, the two sisters behind PARDICOLOR, are passionate wildlife conservationists, and believe in the power of art in communicating the huge issues affecting wildlife today, and in promoting positive change. They are keen to secure more funding for the Creative Arts Fund and increase the amount of support they can offer change-making artists every year.

One project they supported in 2025, shows the power of starting small and seeing where a project can lead. They supported Bristol (UK) based artist Marta Zubieta to make a series of artworks in her signature surreal style, depicting the fragility of habitats and remarkable species. Marta was then able to enter Upfest, the Europe's largest street art festival, and painted a huge mural of her work, 'Jungle Tea Time' during May 2026.

Marta's works are available to buy in PARDICOLOR's **online shop**, alongside the works of other artists curated in their Design Lab, all raising funds for wildlife conservation. There are a few more exciting works being released during June and July, including works by Indian graphic designer Muhammed Sajid, and South African painter Olivié Keck, both raising funds for big cat conservation in Asia.

Field Moments

Dr. Jane Goodall and John Hare with The King of the Gobi, a striking portrait of a bull Wild Camel by wildlife artist Charlotte Williams. The artwork captures the strength, resilience, and stoic character of one of the world's rarest large mammals. Charlotte Williams is a highly regarded wildlife artist with a rapidly growing reputation. This portrait is an excellent likeness and embodies all the resilient and stoical characteristics of the bull Wild Camel. Reprints and original prints of The King of the Gobi are available for purchase at: https://ko-fi.com/s/7d91794794

In April 2025, the renewal of Management Agreement between the Wild Camel Protection Foundation and the Mongolian Ministry of Environment and Climate Change was formally signed at the Ministry offices in Ulaanbaatar. This written agreement is a legal requirement in Mongolia, as the Wild Camel is listed as an Endangered species on the IUCN Red List and is also included in the Mongolian Red Book, making its protection the legal responsibility of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change.

Field Moments

Wild Camel in breeding center in Zakhyn Us, with the Eej Khaikhan Moutain in the background. Eej Khairkhan Mountain, meaning “Mother Mountain”, is a sacred landmark in Mongolia’s Gobi Desert associated with a well-known local legend. According to the story, Eej Khairkhan was a beautiful woman who escaped from the cruel Burkhan Buudai Khan and returned toward her homeland, only to be transformed into a mountain while fleeing his pursuing soldiers. The nearby Burkhan Buudai and Sutai mountains are said to represent the khan and her loyal servant, making the landscape a powerful symbol of Mongolian folklore, memory, and spirituality.

Making a Difference: Volunteer with WCPF USA

The Wild Camel Protection Foundation USA is looking for passionate volunteers to help support conservation, education, outreach, media, and nonprofit development efforts focused on one of the rarest mammals on Earth, the endangered Wild Camel (*Camelus ferus*) of the Gobi Desert. With approximately 1,000 Wild Camels remaining in the world and none in zoos anywhere, public awareness and international collaboration are more important than ever.

We welcome volunteers with backgrounds or interests in:

- Wildlife conservation
- Social media & marketing
- Graphic design
- Fundraising & nonprofit development
- Education & outreach
- Writing & communications
- Event coordination
- Research & grant writing
- Zoo, museum, or conservation partnerships

Volunteers may assist with educational exhibits, social media campaigns, school and zoo outreach, conservation events, partnership development, fundraising, and international awareness initiatives.

This is a great opportunity to gain nonprofit and conservation experience while helping protect one of the least-known endangered species on Earth.

Although we are based in New Jersey, remote volunteers are welcome, and students are encouraged to apply.

If interested, please message us directly or email us at

wildcamelusa (AT) gmail (DOT) com

DISCOVER WILD CAMEL AT ZOO NEW YORK

ZOO NEW YORK
AT THOMPSON PARK

27 JUNE 2026
10AM – 5PM

Zoo New York
Watertown, New York

There are about 1,000 Wild Camels remaining in Gobi Desert of Mongolia and China. There are 0 in zoos, and around 40 individuals in the breeding centers in Mongolia. This makes the Wild Camel one of the rarest large mammals on Earth.

Join us to discover the Gobi Desert in Mongolia and the many species that call it home — and learn how we are working to protect the last 1,000 Wild Camels on Earth.

Wild Camel Protection Foundation

WILD CAMEL PROTECTION FOUNDATION • USA •

Educational Program for Zoos and Schools

The Wild Camel Protection Foundation USA is pleased to introduce an engaging **educational exhibit** focused on the **endangered Wild Camel (*Camelus ferus*) and the unique ecosystem of the Gobi Desert**. Through interactive activities, visual storytelling, and hands-on learning, this exhibit brings one of the world's least-known species to life while highlighting the importance of global biodiversity conservation.

Designed for visitors of all ages, the program combines science, culture, and conservation to create meaningful and memorable learning experiences. From animal identification games and 3D papercraft activities to short documentaries, livestream from Gobi and public seminars, the exhibit offers flexible components that can be adapted to zoos, schools, and community spaces.

We warmly welcome **zoos, schools, and educational institutions** to participate and collaborate with us in bringing this program to your audience.

Together, we can inspire curiosity, raise awareness, and empower the next generation to protect our planet's most vulnerable species.

Download the introduction brochure

The Wild Camel is endangered, with only around a thousand left in the wild. Every individual carries genetic value essential for the species' survival.

Your support helps the Wild Camel Protection Foundation protect Wild Camels in Mongolia through conservation, research, and education.

Every donation matters. Help secure their future.

Donate Now

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

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