

## Project Update February 2026

**Rufford I.D.:** Behavioural Ecology and Social Dynamics of Wild Camels (*Camelus ferus*) in the Gobi A Desert (Mongolia)

**Project Title:**

**Update:** 46392-1

Following the spring field season, all planned behavioural observations were successfully completed, and the analytical phase of the project has now been concluded. Comprehensive analyses of the behavioural dataset have been finalised and form the core of my thesis, which I plan to submit in the spring.

The analyses included a detailed quantification of the activity time budget of wild camels, as well as the examination of temporal patterns across hours of the day and defined daily time blocks. Behavioural data were further analysed to assess vigilance behaviour in relation to herd size using mixed-effects modelling approaches.

Social behaviour was analysed in depth, including the frequency and categorisation of social interactions, as well as the identification of interaction initiators and recipients across sex and age classes. Interaction network structures were examined to describe social organisation and individual roles within groups. The interaction network was dominated by agonistic and play-related behaviours, providing new insights into social roles and social development in wild camels.

In addition, selected behavioural categories were analysed in relation to environmental variables, particularly air temperature and wind speed, to assess behavioural flexibility under harsh and variable desert conditions.

Together, these analyses provide a first comprehensive behavioural framework and baseline dataset for wild camels, which will be synthesised into future scientific publication. For this reason, detailed results are not presented at this stage. This research represents an important step toward describing and better understanding the behavioural ecology and social interactions of wild camels and serves as a building block for future research on wild camel behaviour.

Importantly, strong friendships were built during the project with the staff at the Wild Camel Breeding Centre within the Great Gobi A Strictly Protected Area. Their hospitality and warmth made the vast desert feel like home, and I am deeply grateful for the connections and kindness I experienced. I remain in close contact with local practitioners, enabling continued exchange of information on wild camel behaviour and conservation-relevant observations. We are also jointly planning further research activities, including additional fieldwork during the summer grazing period.