

EXTRA-LIMITAL RECORDS OF THE ONE-HUMPED CAMEL IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper documents unusual and new records of camels in several countries of West and Central Africa. For some countries it appears that the camels discussed in this paper are the first national introductions. In most cases of novel introduction, the camels arrived as personal gifts to Heads of State from the President of Libya.

Key words: Africa, *Camelus dromedarius*, exotic species, geographic distribution, livestock introductions

The total world population of the one-humped camel (*Camelus dromedarius*) in 2011 has been estimated at about 20.2 million with a slight increase in populations during recent years (FAOStat, 2012). This species is native to the Near East, South Asia and North Africa including the Horn of Africa. With very few exceptions, camels inhabit arid or semi-arid regions, characterised by annual precipitation that is small in amount and brief in duration: there is usually a long dry season which may last for more than 8 months.

The camel is a resident of every desert zone of northern Africa and the area normally referred to as the "Sahel" constitutes the southern limit of its normal distribution. In western and central Africa this boundary may be expressed by the 14° N parallel of latitude, or more precisely by the isohyet of 400 mm. In the east, the Horn of Africa has about 35% of the world camel population and taking into account the particularly arid conditions of this zone, the area of distribution extends as far as latitude 3° S (Bourzat and Wilson, 1987). Camels have been increasingly reported to occur south of the limit but some "statistics" of presence should be viewed with caution. Since the well publicised droughts of the 1970s, there have been many transitory visits to the south in search of feed for camels. During 1983, a large part of the nomadic camel breeders of Mauritania crossed the frontier into Senegal to seek refuge from the drought. The breeders of Chad, Niger and Cameroon made similar journeys into Nigeria, Central African Republic and Benin.

There have been, however, many introductions and attempted introductions, meant to be permanent

or long term, to areas outside its native range, including North and South America, the Caribbean, Australia and Europe. Two recent attempts to introduce camels to Europe relate to the late brother leader and guide of the revolution of the former Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (or more simply the President of Libya). Gaddafi once arrived at a so-called non-aligned summit in Belgrade (former Yugoslavia) with 2 horses and 6 camels which arrived on a separate aeroplane; the Yugoslavs allowed him to graze the camels in front of his hotel (where he pitched his tent and drank fresh camel milk) but they refused to allow him to ride to the conference on one of his horses, saying it would be "inappropriate": some of the camels were still in Belgrade zoo several years later (Fisk, 2000). On another occasion, when the Italian Prime Minister was on a visit to Libya he was presented with camels as a personal gift but he refused to take them back to Italy, pleading lack of space in his aircraft.

An earlier paper on the one-humped camel provided information on new and unusual records for 7 countries in southern and eastern Africa (Wilson, 2013). The presidents of at least 4 countries in that area – Lesotho, Swaziland, Zimbabwe and Mozambique – received camels as personal gifts from Gaddafi and 3 others – Botswana, Madagascar and Namibia – were also to receive camels in such a way but no references or information has been found to indicate that they did so. This paper now documents introductions (either from Gaddafi's gifts or from other sources) and the presence of the one-humped camel in West and Central African countries to the south of the 14° N parallel of latitude and west

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of the 30° line of longitude in areas that are outside its “normal” distributional range.

Materials and Methods

The information provided in this paper was gathered from the author’s own observations, from a detailed search of the literature and from internet searches. This was complemented by personal correspondence and intercourse with relevant people in the countries of the area.

Country accounts

Angola

There are anecdotal notes on camels being imported to Angola from North Africa to carry water to working crews on the dry areas during the construction of the Benguela railway (Stead and Rorison, 2013). More formal sources (Benguela Railway Company, 1929; Hance and van Dongen, 1956) do not, however, make any reference to camels in this or any other context.

Belgian Congo

In the early days of colonialism, the Belgian Congo attempted to introduce or use several exotic species. Amongst these were the domestic(water) buffalo (Bequaert, 1938), the Indian elephant which it was hoped could be used to train African elephants and the zebra (Bellotti, 1952). No reference has been found to introduction of camels and there do not appear to be any records of this animal in the Belgian Royal Museum of Central Africa (Wendelen, 2014). That there were camels in the Congo, however, indisputable as shown by to postcards produced about 1910 in which camels are being used as baggage animals in Leopoldville (Figs 1a, 1b): the city is now Kinshasha in the Democratic Republic of Congo and is situated at 4° 15' S latitude and 15° 18' E longitude.

Benin

The only record of camels in Benin is a photographic one (Fig 2) in the city of Natitingou situated at 10° 18' N latitude and 1° 22' E longitude (Hobo Traveller, 2013). The pictures clearly show that the camels are from Mauritania from the dress of their handlers and the typical Moor saddle.

Burundi

Five camels were presented to the President of Burundi in January 2008 (Boutellis, 2011). These animals were kept in the grounds of the Presidential residence in Bujumbura (located at 3° 22' S, 29° 22'

E) but were occasionally allowed to roam the nearby streets, feeding on the roadside (Smith, 2010).

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

Gaddafi presented 5 camels to the President of the Côte d'Ivoire in 2008. Unlike several other countries these were put on display at Abidjan zoo (5° 19' N, 4° 02' W, Fig 3) but only 2 short years later in 2010 they were dead, according to a zoo employee, from “lack of care and from eating unsuitable food” (Koffi, 2011).

There are also reports of at least one camel at Assinie Crocodile Farm some 80 km east of Abidjan (5° 8' N, 3° 19' W).

Gambia

The Deputy Libyan Ambassador to the Gambia presented a “a gift from our leader, Brother Gaddafi, to his brother, President Jammeh” on May 2, 2008 (Jawneh, 2008). The gift comprised 2 adult female camels, one adult male and one young of each sex. These animals – or what is left of them – as well befits the private property of a President of a Republic have since been cloistered behind the high walls that surround his farm (13° 18' N, 16° 40' W), their presence known to only a few but celebrated by a life size statue at the imposing entrance to the demesne (Fig 4a). The Department of Livestock Services was “not aware” of the presence of camels (Ceessay, 2014).

One other group of camels in Gambia is found in a “Camel Park” (Fig 4b) on the Atlantic coast at Tanji (13° 22' N, 16° 47' W). There are normally about 8 camels at this park that are used for tourist rides on the beach. The park owner is a Spaniard which accounts for the use of a side-by-side saddle for 2 people of the type used in the Canary Islands (Wilson and Gutierrez, 2014). The provenance of these animals is Senegal from where they have to be regularly replenished as a result of deaths from tsetse-borne trypanosomosis (Janneh, 2014)

There is a long and complicated folk tale about camels in the Gambia (Bojang and Bojang, 2011) which might possibly indicate an earlier presence in the country.

Ghana

Camels should have arrived in Ghana from Libya in early May 2008 (Jawneh, 2008) but it has not been found possible to verify that they did so. The department of livestock in the Ministry of Agriculture was unable to verify that there were camels in the

country (Fynn, 2014) as was the department of Animal Science of the University of Ghana (Osei-Amponsah, 2014). There are, nonetheless, indubitably camels in Ghana. There is at least one normally resident at Accra Zoo (5° 35' N, 0° 11' W, Fig 5a) although this is known to have been transferred to Kumasi Zoo during refurbishment of the park. One source written in mid-2012 says that this animal arrived from Libya after Colonel Gaddafi's palace was sacked (Tim, 2012): this event took place in August 2011 so it is possible that this camel is not one of the original gifts from Gaddafi to the Ghanaian President. Whatever the case, there was still a camel at Accra zoo in September 2014 (Ghoshal, 2014).

In August 2014 an international firm with a branch in Ghana relaunched an antiseptic cream and soap under the brand name Camel Antiseptic (Larbie, 2014). As part of the launch, a manager of the company rode a camel. This animal was "borrowed" for the event from the Ghanaian army (Afflu, 2014): it is possible that this and other camels kept by the army are the Gaddafi's gift to the Ghanaian president.

A second donation of camels to Ghana was made by Gaddafi when 4 animals were transported by air direct to Kumasi in November 2009. These were presented to Otumfuo, the Asantehene Osei Tutu the Second, who subsequently donated them to the Kumasi Zoo. (6E 40' N, 1E 34' W, Fig 5b) (Scott, 2014).

Zambia

The 1st of only 2 early references to camels in northern Rhodesia (Zambia) dates from 1896. At that time, Hugh Marshall, the 1st Magistrate and Postmaster at Abercorn (now Mbala), wrote to his brother in England "Fancy a Traction Engine for the Lakes Coy. For the Katunga- Blantyre Road! Another white elephant! Oh, yes - some talk of camels as well" (Clay, 1962). The other record is of an imprecise location but somewhere along the northern bank of the Zambezi. This was in 1915 when 8 Germans and 1 rebel Dutchman with 5 camels and one horse were captured by a mobile unit of the northern Rhodesia Rifles. It is believed the group was escaping from Southwest Africa (Namibia) in an attempt to join the



Fig 1a



Fig 1b

Fig 1. Postcards of camels used as baggage animals in the former Leopoldville of the Belgian Congo (author's collection).



Fig 2. Riding camels in Natitingou Benin West Africa (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TU6l7khF3Co>).

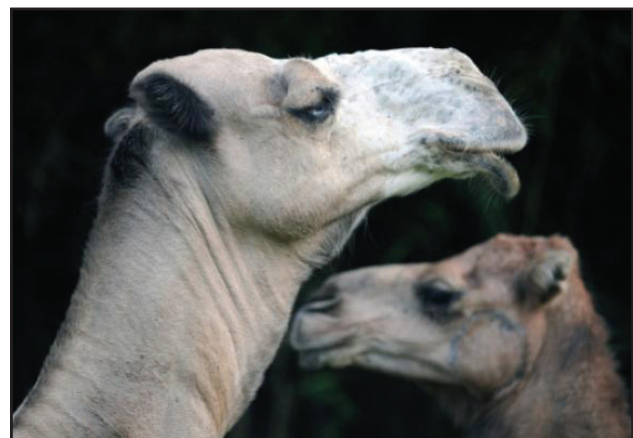


Fig 3. Head of camel held at Abidjan zoo, Côte d'Ivoire (<http://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/animals-starve-to-death-in-icoast-zoo-1.1112681#.VFYIghbvYjB>)



Fig 4a



Fig 4b

Fig 4. Statue of camel outside the personal farm of the President of Gambia and entrance to “Camel Park” at Tanji in Gambia (photographs by Trevor Wilson).



Fig 5a



Fig 5b

Fig 5. A single camel at Accra zoo in July 2011 and three camels at Kumasi zoo (<http://www.leszoosdanslemonde.com/description/endangered-primate-centre-accra-zoo.php>; <http://madinghana.wordpress.com/2011/06/20/qaddafi-in-kumasi/>



Fig 6. Camels at Lusaka zoo (<http://zambiaconservation.blogspot.co.uk/>).

forces of Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck in German East Africa (Tanzania). They were prevented from escaping by the single guard in charge of them by the simple expedient of confiscating their trousers every night because "it is impossible to ride a camel without trousers" (Brelsford, 1954).

Camels were donated to the Zambian President on at least 2 occasions by Gaddafi of Libya. The 2nd occasion was in January 2008 when one bull and 4

female camels were presented to Zambian President Levy Mwanawasa. The bull died immediately he was unloaded from the aircraft (Vincent, 2009) before the President promptly “donated his personal camels that were given to him by Libyan President Muammar Al-Gaddafi to Zambians”. In a speech read on his behalf Mwanawasa said “In this regard, I am handing the animals over to the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) under the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources, who will manage them on behalf of and for the benefit of the people of Zambia. Accordingly, these animals are here forth the property of the state” and added that in the past when Libya donated camels to Zambia, they all died. Mwanawasa urged ZAWA to work with the veterinary services department to ensure that the camels were regularly vaccinated and monitored to ensure that they were not attacked by any diseases to which the ZAWA director general replied that he would keep them well and to ensure that they could have more camels in Zambia so that in future they could also be distributed to some of the National Parks and thus enhance tourism products (Manning, 2008). These 4 camels

were kept at Munda Wanga Botanical Gardens and Zoo (Fig 6) some 16 km south of Lusaka at 15° 34' S, 28° 16' E until at least the middle of May 2011 (Mario Portugal, 2011).

Other countries

The aeroplane delivering camels to The Gambia in May 2008 was loaded with animals for a total of 8 countries (Jawneh, 2008). In addition to the Gambia, both Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have already been discussed. Other known destinations were Burkina Faso and Liberia but no further information has been found for these countries. The identity of the remaining three countries has not been discovered.

Discussion

There have been many attempts, over many hundreds of years, to introduce the one-humped camel to areas outside its normal range. Few of these have been successful (Wilson, 2013).

Most recent introductions to the countries of West and Central Africa have been political ploys by an eccentric and now defunct Arab dictator. Almost without exception these introductions have proved to be biologically unsuccessful and have often resulted in internal problems and ridicule for the recipient president and government. This could account for the fact that in both The Gambia and Ghana the official livestock and veterinary services are "unaware" of the camels that are the personal property of their presidents. In the case of Zambia the country's president was astute enough to deflect any problems by deciding that the gift was not to himself but to the people of the country as a whole.

The one-humped camel is supremely adapted to hot dry environments with limited feed resources. As such it has some potential, if introduced, for mitigating some effects of climate change in the arid and marginal areas of some countries outside its normal range. Before serious attempts at large scale introduction are made, however, there should be serious longer term studies on the biological, economic, environmental and social aspects of such an action.

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web. This does not invalidate what has been learnt but usually leaves it incomplete.

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