**PRESS RELEASE**

**The Dutch government has excluded dromedary camels from the list of domestic animals!!**

This strange decision was taken by the Dutch government following the advice of a “scientific committee” who decided that the dromedary is not far enough domesticated to be admitted to the domestic and hobby animal list. Consequently, dromedaries cannot be kept anymore in The Netherlands from 2024, and later possibly also not in other European countries. According to this committee, the dromedary meets only one of the three characteristics of advanced domestication. The Committee argued notably that dromedaries may carry the high-risk zoonotic pathogen MERS-CoV, can provide injuries on human, and that the social organization of the herd is characterized by a despotic domination of the male. Furthermore, it is of the opinion that the behavior of dromedaries is mainly the result of habituation and not of domestication.

Yet, during the more than 5000 years of domestication process of camels, long-term selection has taken place on docility and tameness as it has been revealed in a recent paper[[1]](#footnote-1). As a result, the dromedary has adapted to life close to man and can be handled very well by man. Not much further targeted selection has taken place because its tameness was ample enough for the main functions as a beast of burden and producer of milk and meat of this "multipurpose" animal. During the last decade, initiatives have starting in marker-assisted breeding for increased milk and meat production in dromedaries.

During the domestication process, according to archaeological evidence, the dromedary decreased in size, and color changes in the skin were demonstrated. In addition to these morphological changes, which were not present in the wild ancestors, genetic research has also shown differential signals of selection, e.g., to stress response, with respect to the non-domesticated relatives, i.e. the wild two-humped camel (*Camelus ferus*). With these features of selection, also referred to as ‘domestication syndrome’, the dromedary meets all the characteristics of a far-reaching domestication state.

In dromedaries, selection was mainly based on tameness and selection took place in a vast habitat where mixing with other domesticated dromedaries took place. As a result, the genetic variation in dromedaries is much greater than that of most other domesticated animal species, which went through secondary bottlenecks during breed formation.

There is no scientific substantiation that the behavior of the dromedary is mainly the result of habituation, which is defined as behavioural modification of an individual by means of early socialization. On the contrary, there is clear evidence for a permanent genetic modification in dromedaries that has led, among other things, to a heritable predisposition toward association with humans. Moreover, for the species whose domestication is under process (for example the cane rate), an important part of the population remains still wild. For dromedaries, except Australian population, which is feral and not wild, and easy to “re-domesticate”, there is no longer a "wild" representative of the species

The scientific community working on large camelids and gathered in the International Society of Camelid Research and Development (ISOCARD) is surprised by the decision of the Dutch government, which is not based on convenient scientific expertise and knowledge, unless to consider biting dogs, mad cows or chicken carrying avian flu as non-domesticated animals.

1. Fitak R.R., Mohandesan E., Corander J., Yadamsuren A., Chuluubat B., Abdelhadi O., Raziq A., Nagy P., Walzer C., Faye B., Burger A.P., 2020. Genomic signatures of domestication in Old World camels. Comm. Biol., 3, 316, 10 p., https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-020-1039-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)