LIVING WITH HERDS
Human–Animal Coexistence in Mongolia

Domestic animals have lived with humans for thousands of years and remain essential within the everyday lives of people throughout the world. In this book, Natasha Fijn examines the process of animal domestication in a study that blends biological and social anthropology, ethology, and ethnography. She examines the social behavior of humans and animals in a contemporary Mongolian herding society. While living with Mongolian herding families and their herd animals, Dr. Fijn observed both sides of the human–animal relationship. Examining their reciprocal social behavior and communication with one another, she demonstrates how herd animals influence Mongolian herders and how the animals themselves are active partners in the domestication process.

Natasha Fijn is a researcher and observational filmmaker. Her main research focus is on human–animal interaction and social engagement. She currently lectures in Visual Culture Research at the Australian National University. Natasha has a background in anthropology, zoology, and wildlife filmmaking. She has worked with the BBC, Natural History New Zealand, and Green Umbrella Productions on wildlife documentaries and is now working as an independent filmmaker.
LIVING WITH HERDS

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CONTENTS

Lists of Plates, Figures, Maps, Tables, and Online Video Segments  page vii
Glossary xi
Acknowledgments xvii

PART ONE: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

PROLOGUE: LIFE IN THE KHANGAI MOUNTAINS . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . ..
## Contents

### PART THREE: LIVING WITH HERDS

7 **IN THE LAND OF THE HORSE** ........................................... 151  
   Part I. The Horse in Mongolia’s Past 153  
   Part II. The Naadam 160  

8 **THE CYCLE OF LIFE: BIRTH TO DEATH, SPRING TO WINTER** .... 175  

9 **THE DOMESTIC AND THE WILD** ........................................ 201  

10 **THE SACRED ANIMAL** ................................................... 221  
    CONCLUSION: CO-DOMESTIC LIVES ................................. 241  

**Appendix** 247  
**References** 251  
**Index** 271
LISTS OF PLATES, FIGURES, MAPS, TABLES, AND ONLINE VIDEO SEGMENTS

PLATES

Spring

Plates 1–8 precede page 1.

1. Brewing spring storm.
2. Feeding milk to a lamb with an ox horn.
4. Neighbouring herders combing cashmere from a goat.
5. Saikhanaa returning from herding.
6. Ewes and nannies nursing their young within an encampment.
7. Khorlo handling a two-year-old (byaruu).
8. Naraa milking a sarlag by hand.

Summer

Plates 9–16 precede page 53.

9. Tibetan script on carved stone.
10. Collecting firewood with oxen.
11. Three jockeys resting between races.
12. Winning horse with medals.
13. Winning stallion with jockey and trainer.
14. Wrestling at a local Naadam.
15. Resting while out herding.
16. Deer stone (Bugan chuluu) lying out on the grassland.

Autumn

Plates 17–24 precede page 129.

17. Ulaanaa (Red) ox with a water cart.
18. Training a young ox.
19. Dogsomjav setting up the autumn encampment.
Lists of Plates, Figures, Maps, Tables, and Online Video Segments

20. Horse hitching post and washing line.
21. Sacred Övöö with stallion skulls.
22. Human out herding with horse, sheep, and goats.
23. Mongolian sarlag bull (Tarlan bukh).
24. Ochero dismounting after the day’s herding.

Winter
25. Sacred lone tree in the valley.
27. Early lamb with children.
28. Snow falling inside a ger.
29. Passing snuff, with the horse herd in the background.
30. Moving a sick sheep under shelter.
31. Herding sheep and goats in winter.
32. Footprints leaving a neighbouring encampment.

FIGURES
P.1 Key people related to Dogsomjav’s encampment .......... page 6
P.2 Key people related to Choijo’s encampment .......... 12
3.1 Naraa’s drawing of the Jargalant Valley .......... 58
4.1 Genealogy of a Mongolian horse .......... 84
4.2 Genealogy of a Mongolian cow .......... 85
4.3 Mongolian cattle and sarlag hybridisation .......... 89
4.4 Drawings of tamga symbols .......... 94
5.1 Proportions of correct horse responses to herder vocalisations .. 116
5.2 Proportions of correct cattle responses to herder vocalisations .. 117
8.1 Seasonal calendar .......... 176
8.2 Migratory movements between seasonal pastures .......... 184
9.1 Conceptual diagram of wild–domestic spheres .......... 203
10.1 Depiction of Malin Banzurageh .......... 222
10.2 Shaman’s drawing of a seter animal .......... 233

MAPS
P.1 Mongolia .......... 2
P.2 Bulgan field site .......... 11
P.3 Arkhangai field site .......... 15
Lists of Plates, Figures, Maps, Tables, and Online Video Segments

TABLES

P.1 Animal numbers at the Bulgan field site .......................... 8
P.2 Animal numbers at the Arkhangai field site ..................... 14
3.1 Timeline of Mongolian horses ..................................... 69
3.2 Timeline of Mongolian cattle ..................................... 71
3.3 Timeline of Mongolian sheep and goats ......................... 78
4.1 Terms for male and female herd animals, based on breeding
    status ......................................................................... 86
4.2 Categorisation of ages of four kinds of herd animal .......... 96
7.1 Astrological table for racehorses .................................. 164
7.2 Race categories ......................................................... 167

Appendix Tables

A.1 Categorisation of horse colours in Mongolia .................... 247
A.2 Medicinal plants for herd animals ................................. 249

ONLINE VIDEO SEGMENTS
www.cambridge.org/9781107000902

1 Saikhanaa the Herder
2 Saikhanaa and the Calves
3 Saikhanaa and the Horses
4 Moving Encampments
   1. Moving Encampments by Ox
   2. Moving with the Herd Animals
5 Lhagva the Herder
6 A Day in the Life
7 Medicinal Treatment
8 Training for Naadam
9 The Naadam
10 Vocalisation Dictionary
GLOSSARY

i. General Mongolian terms

Ail          one family’s home
Am           mouth
Am’d         anything that lives or is animate
Am’tan       animal (often wild)
Arat         folk method of breeding livestock
Arkhangai    Mongolian province within the Khangai; an area of one of the field sites
Baigal       nature
Baigal’ gazar landscape or place
Baigal’ orchin environment
Bulgan       Mongolian province within the Khangai; an area of one of the field sites
Deel         a long garment, similar to a coat or dress
Em dom       magical medicinal cure; medicinal home remedy
Ger          home, that is, a nomadic tent, equivalent to the yurt
Geriin tejeever to feed or nurture within the domestic sphere
Im           earmark or symbol
Jakhdag      a lock of hair
Khadag       blue, silk sash
Khangai      Mongolia’s central mountainous region
Khirigsuur   ancient stone monument and grave site of Turkic origin
Khot ail     family encampment, domestic sphere
Khusuur      scraper, made from wood or pelican beak; used for scraping sweat from horses or as a brush for dislodging dirt from a horse
Mal          domestic animal or herd animal
Malchin      herder
Maliin banzuragch God who protects the five kinds of animals
Glossary

Mal süreg  to herd
Morin Khuur  Mongolian horse-head fiddle
Naadam  festival or celebration
Negdel  a cooperative or a communal farm during the Soviet era
Otor  a temporary camp where herd animals graze on better pastures
Övöö  sacred rock cairn on prominent mountain top
Saalchin  milker
Seter  Sacred or holy animal (Tibetan, tsehtar)
Shilbuur  elongated whip
Soijakh  hardening animals for winter
Tänga  brand or stamp on horse’s headquarters and the branding iron itself
Tavan khošuu mal  the five kinds of animal
Tenger  the sky, the heavens, a god, the weather
Tsagaan Sar  White Month, or Mongolian New Year celebration
Tsetserleg  garden; central town in Arkhangai Province
Udgan  a woman shaman or healer
Uurga  horse lasso-pole
Zud  severe weather during winter
Züs  external features; coat colour

ii. Mongolian dairy products

Aarts  curds from sour milk, made from boiled yoghurt with a portion of milk: The curds are placed in cotton cloth and pressed between boards to remove the whey. May be stored in sheep stomach and used during the winter.

Aaruul  curds that are pressed, sliced, and then dried, with or without sugar added: They are dried on a board in the open air on the roof of the ger, or hung inside above the fireplace. Yak aaruul is made into larger portions and contains a higher fat content.

Airag  fermented mare’s milk, known as “white beer” or “koumiss”: Fresh mare’s milk is poured into a cowskin bag. Milk is added to an initial culture throughout the day and then churned 800–1,000 times and left to ferment overnight. Airag has a sweet–sour taste and fragrant smell.

Byaslag  cheese made from warm milk with a small portion of yoghurt: After the milk turns to curd, the mixture is placed

1 For more detailed information regarding some of these dairy products, see Indra (2003).
in cotton cloth and pressed between boards to remove the whey (the cheese is not salted or aged the way many cheeses are).

Eezgii yoghurt added to milk to become sour, to curdle: Eezgii is the residue on the bottom after boiling.

Nermel distilled spirit from fermented milk: The fermented milk is placed in a wooden barrel and repeatedly heated to distill a liquor from the condensation that forms inside the barrel. The liquor has an alcohol content of approximately 10–12 percent.

Örôm thick cream: Milk is heated and aerated with a ladle and left to congeal for twelve to twenty-four hours; then the cream is scooped off the top. The substance is often eaten with bread, tea, and deep-fried dough for breakfast.

Shar tos “yellow oil,” or boiled butter: It is made from fermented cream that has been stored in sheep stomach or wooden tubs.

Suutei tsai brick tea made with milk and salt: The mixture is poured from a height until the milk has homogenised.

Tarag yoghurt: It is made from a portion of previous yoghurt culture added to warm milk, covered with cloth overnight to activate the culture. Obtained from cow, goat, and sheep milk in summer.

Tsagaan tos “white oil,” derived from fermented cream: Boiled butter is mixed with eezgii and flour, hot tea, or water. It is often eaten with sugar.

Tseghe milk-based alcoholic drink similar to airag but made from cow, sheep, or goat milk: Milk or water is often added to the drink to reduce sourness.

Tsotgii unboiled milk made into cream: It is made from cow, sheep, and goat milk.

Tsotgiiin tos butter: It is made from tsotgii.

Uurag colostrum, or rich protein milk after the birth of young: It solidifies into a creamy, jelly-like consistency, slightly sweet and similar to egg in taste.

iii. Key animal terms

Aduu Mongolian horse

Argali mountain sheep

2 For a dictionary of Mongolian animal husbandry terms, refer to Dorjgotov (1999).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Glossary</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Azarga</td>
<td>stallion, uncastrated male horse (also a horse herd, including a stallion with mares and young)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bod</td>
<td>horses, camels, and “large cattle,” such as yak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bog</td>
<td>sheep and goats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukh</td>
<td>bull, or uncastrated male horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byaruu</td>
<td>two-year-old cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daaga</td>
<td>two-year-old horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em khon’</td>
<td>ewe, female sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Em yamaa</td>
<td>nanny, or female goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er byaruu</td>
<td>bullock, or young male cattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunj</td>
<td>heifer, or a young cow that has not yet calved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gitü</td>
<td>mare, or female horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireg</td>
<td>wether, or castrated male sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khainag</td>
<td>cross-breed between a yak and a cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khuts</td>
<td>ram, or male sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mor’</td>
<td>gelding, or castrated male horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortoom</td>
<td>second-generation cross between yak and cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarlag</td>
<td>yak, including both male and females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serkh</td>
<td>wether, or castrated male goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shar</td>
<td>ox, or castrated male bovine (yak, yak–cow hybrid, Mongolian cattle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takhi</td>
<td>Asiatic wild horse – known as Przewalski’s horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temee</td>
<td>Bactrian camel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugjikh</td>
<td>bottle-fed lamb or kid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhna</td>
<td>buck (or billy), or a male goat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yangir</td>
<td>mountain goat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### iv. Key behavioural terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aashtai</td>
<td>moody, bad tempered, ill bred, momentarily angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agsam mor’</td>
<td>a horse with mettle, or spirited and lively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darkblakh</td>
<td>protector of the herd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogshin</td>
<td>impolite, difficult to control, perhaps violent, fearful, unbroken horse (opposite of nomkhon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dölgöön</td>
<td>calm, peaceful (dölgöön aasb is an animal with a gentle disposition; Dölgöön is also a common name)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emneg</td>
<td>untamed, similar to khangal (often applied to oxen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erkh</td>
<td>self-willed, pampered (but can also mean “tame” with animals, or “spoilt” in relation to children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khangal</td>
<td>wild, untamed, untrained, unbroken horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khatuu amtai</td>
<td>hard-mouthed horse, or a horse that pulls on the reins and is unresponsive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Glossary

Khatuu khamtai  |  hard-nosed ox, unresponsive to signals
Khenz          |  individual animal that is small and cute, literally meaning “late born”
Khöngön khöltei |  easy riding horse, or an ox that is light footed and quick stepping
Muu            |  bad, not good, useless, evil (or muukhai when the animal butts and kicks)
Nomkhon        |  tame, quiet, calm or placid (key word to indicate a good animal; the antonym of aashtai)
Omgolon        |  restive, impulsive, difficult, arrogant, or haughty
Ooro           |  shy, elusive (often in relation to horses, oroo dogshin means spirited whereas oroo khuljaa means a runaway horse)
Sain           |  good, fine, kind, or nice
Sergelin       |  quick witted, alert, or astute (sergelin galzuu can mean “a bit crazy”)
Shildeg        |  selected, the best; used in relation to racehorses
Shiruun        |  tough, rude, rough, violent behaviour (similar to omgon and aashtai)
Shudenge mor’  |  green, or newly broken-in horse (also referred to as sain nomkbroo ügüi mor)
Taivan         |  calm, gentle, peaceful (similar to dölgöön)
Tolgoilogch    |  leader
Tsogio mor’    |  horse that is a galloper
Zalkhuu        |  lazy, or idle
Zerleg         |  wild, or not habituated to humans (can also mean “crazy”)
Zöölon amtai   |  soft-mouted horse, quiet when ridden (similarly referred to as am zöölon surgul’tai, as a manageable, or trained horse)
Zöölon khamtai |  soft-nosed ox, quiet and easy to pull along or hitch behind a cart
Zörüüd         |  stubborn or obstinate (often a loner)
I will begin by thanking the first Mongolian family I met, Nyamdorj’s family, who resided in Canberra, Australia. Delgermaa gave me lessons in Mongolian and translated for me, even though she was often busy. I am deeply indebted to many people in Mongolia for their willingness to accept me into their lives and for their unbounded hospitality. Thanks to Tuul for taking me in when I needed accommodation in Ulaanbaatar and involving me with all of her family. She and her family were always welcoming when I arrived at short notice from one of my field sites, or even after I had been absent for more than a year.

There are many people that showed me great kindness and helped make my life easier in Mongolia, even in small ways. It is due to this unbridled hospitality that I had a remarkably untroubled field experience, as I felt safe and never felt ill at ease while living in Choijo’s or Dogsomjav’s encampments. I could not have written this book without the daily communication and engagement I experienced with the herd animals while I was in Mongolia, whom I came to know as individuals and as real characters and personalities.

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My mother Anne Gillespie and my father John Fijn have always been extremely supportive. I value that Dad encouraged me to embark on this
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Author’s Note

I took all photographs and digital video footage, which supplement this book, during my time in the field in Mongolia (during 2005 and the spring of 2007). Throughout this book Mongolian words are designated in parentheses and italicised. I have referred to the names of Mongolian protagonists by the shortened versions of their names that were used in an everyday sense, unless informants asked to be referred to by their full name within this book. The translation of Mongolian words is written in accordance with the grammar of Colloquial Mongolian (Sanders & Bat-Ireedüi, 1999), such as the use of “kh” instead of “h” and elongated vowels instead of the shortened form, such as Ulaanbaatar instead of Ulan bator. Mongolian has “front” and “back” vowels. The front vowel of “ö” is pronounced as the “yea” in “yearn” and “ü” as the “u” in “put.” I have opted to designate the “shortened” sound at the end of some words as a single quotation mark, as in “mor” (the word for gelding).
LIVING WITH HERDS
SPRING

Plate 1. Brewing spring storm.

Plate 2. Feeding milk to a lamb with an ox horn.
Plate 3. Uuganaa with new-born calf.

Plate 4. Neighbouring herdsmen combing cashmere from a goat.
Plate 5. Saikhanaa returning from herding.

Plate 6. Ewes and nannies nursing their young within an encampment.
Plate 7. Khorlo handling a two-year-old (*byaruu*).

Plate 8. Naraa milking a *sarlag* by hand.