

Tracking Gobi Grizzlies to Save a Desert

Wildlife Biologist Douglas Chadwick Ventures to the Land of Mongols, Ninjas, Vodka, Gold, and the World's Rarest Bears

Tracking Gobi Grizzlies by Douglas Chadwick

In a remote desert in Mongolia lives the world's rarest bear. *Ursus arctos gobiensis*—Gobi grizzly bears. Today, no more than three to four dozen individuals remain.

In *Tracking Gobi Grizzlies*, wildlife biologist Douglas Chadwick creates a portrait of these rarest of bears' fight for survival in one of the toughest, most remote settings on Earth. He demonstrates why saving this endangered animal supports an entire ecosystem made up of hundreds of interconnected plants and animals, from desert roses to Asiatic lynx and wild double-humped camels, all adapting as best they can to the effects of climate change.

Chadwick's journey sends him into the Gobi desert, Earth's third largest desert, which spans half a million square miles of southern Mongolia and northern China. Rainfall in the Gobi averages just four to six inches annually. Temperatures can reach 122 degrees Fahrenheit in summer and sink to minus 40 in winter. There, he joins a team of Mongolian biologists, rangers and lead scientist Harry Reynolds, an American bear expert, who have been working together on the Gobi Bear Project to catch and radio-collar Gobi grizzly bears, who Mongolians call *mazaalai*.

During the 1960s and 70s, a misguided effort to increase livestock production led to overgrazing of the desert vegetation, and by the start of the 1980s, Gobi bear numbers appeared to have shrunk by at least half. All the known surviving grizzlies inhabit just three small mountain ranges within the Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area A (GGSPA), a reserve established in 1976 that covers roughly 18,000 square miles.

Each of these ranges holds several oases, but those water sources are miles apart from one another, and many offer little in the way of food. One of the initiatives of the Gobi Bear Project is to feed the bears—an unsettling idea to Chadwick, who has spent most of his life in North American grizzly country. How do you make the mental switch from NO FEEDING BEARS to PRO FEEDING BEARS?

In the tradition of Chadwick's best-selling adventure memoir, *The Wolverine Way*, this book reminds us how much we have yet to learn about the world's wildest places and its inhabitants. *Tracking Gobi Grizzlies* is a parable of environmental stewardship in a legendary realm.



Tracking Gobi Grizzlies

DOUGLAS
CHADWICK

Photographs by Joe Riis

BOOK DETAILS

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About the Author

Douglas Chadwick is a wildlife biologist and frequent *National Geographic* contributor who has studied mountain goats and grizzlies in the Rockies, elephants in Africa, and whales in the world's oceans. On assignments from Siberia to the Congo River's headwaters, he has produced several hundred popular articles and eleven books. He is the vice chair of the board of Vital Ground, a nonprofit land trust that has helped safeguard more than 600,000 acres of wildlife habitat in Alaska, Canada, and the western US. Chadwick is also a director of the Gobi Bear Fund, part of the Gobi Bear Initiative. He lives in Whitefish, MT.

Joe Riis (photographer) is a wildlife biologist turned *National Geographic* photographer and a Young Explorers grantee. He lives in Bijou Hills, SD.

Story Angles

- Wildlife biologist Douglas Chadwick's memoir of saving the world's rarest bears in Mongolia, the land of ninjas, vodka and gold
- Gobi Grizzlies: How these bears—the only desert-dwellers of their kind—adapted to one of the most extreme environments on the planet, and how they are now being affected by climate change
- Adventures in the Gobi Desert: A land of wonder and weirdness beyond the back of beyond
- Why the world should help Mongolia save its endangered Gobi bear
- The importance of protecting Umbrella Species: Save Gobi bears, save all the other wild residents that depend upon the same habitats (including the majority of the world's surviving wild Bactrian camels together with wild asses, wolves, Asiatic lynx, argali, ibex, black-tailed gazelles, corsac foxes, snow leopards, and more).

Praise

"More than just a depiction of one species, this book highlights the interconnectedness of all species and man's obligation to protect them, in any location." —Jeff Bridges, actor and activist

"A great and heartening adventure—it makes one hopeful to know these bears simply exist, amid the vast harsh beauty of the Gobi." —Bill McKibben, author of *Eaarth*

"Chadwick has coaxed a page-turning story out of one of the world's roughest places."
—Joel Sartore, *National Geographic* photographer and founder of The Photo Ark

"It's useful—and inspiring—to learn of this unique population of a branch of *Ursus arctos* holding on in such a forbidding niche. A remarkable text." —Gary Snyder, poet and activist

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Author Douglas Chadwick

"*Tracking Gobi Grizzlies* is classic Chadwick: humorous, humble, intellectually stimulating, surprising, moral and wise."
—Rick Bass, activist and author of *The Lost Grizzlies*

"This is, without a doubt, the finest book about desert-dwelling grizzly bears I've ever read."
—Jimmy Kimmel, Emmy nominated host of "Jimmy Kimmel Live," ABC's late-night talk show

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