

## Tracking Gobi Grizzlies: Surviving Beyond the Back of Beyond

**Douglas H. Chadwick**

Patagonia (Dec 16, 2016)

Hardcover \$24.95 (288pp)

978-1-938340-62-8

“In a remote and pitiless desert on the other side of the world from North America lives a bear that science understands only poorly so far and the general public isn’t aware of at all,” writes wildlife biologist Douglas Chadwick. “One of the scarcest creatures on the planet, it is a type of grizzly so extraordinary that its existence is hard to imagine even after you get to its homeland; in fact, *especially* after you get to its homeland.”

The Great Gobi Desert, one of the five largest deserts on the earth, covers half a million square miles, and with rainfall averaging a mere four to six inches per year and temperatures that soar to 122 degrees Fahrenheit in summer and drop to as low as minus forty in winter, it is not the most comfortable place to track, capture, and radio-collar grizzlies. But time is of the essence if this unique subspecies is to be saved; Gobi grizzlies are now the rarest bears in the world, with only three to four dozen remaining. For a month every spring since 2005, the Gobi Bear Project team has been catching and radio-collaring these grizzlies.

Though Chadwick and the other members of the Gobi Bear Project know that saving these big, unruly, long-eared, shaggy, fun-loving, chocolate-colored, bronze, or golden Gobi grizzly bears will not change the world, it will at least keep them in it. That alone would make their work worthwhile, not to mention wild motorcycle rides through the astounding stony landscape and the thrill of discovering a bear in one of their traps.

“Here’s the deal with most of us grown-up naturalists,” Chadwick writes. “While we can toss around Latin names and biological principles, there’s a huge part of us that’s still just an eleven-year-old on a treasure hunt.”

KRISTINE MORRIS (March/April 2017)

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