

# Camel-crazy UAE pioneers cutting-edge breeding technology

September 30 2010, by Nathalie Gillet

---



Camels are displayed during an auction at the Abu Dhabi International Hunting and Equestrian Exhibition in the Emirati capital on September 24, 2010. Cutting-edge technologies such as embryo transfers, artificial insemination and even cloning are used in the United Arab Emirates to breed camels, employed as desert transport since ancient times.

Cutting-edge camel breeding technology, including embryo transfers and cloning, is being pioneered in the United Arab Emirates to reproduce the prized desert beasts that now fetch staggering sums.

At an auction in the desert near Abu Dhabi in February, an Emirati paid 24 million dirhams (6.47 million dollars) for three camels, including one which cost 2.72 million dollars.

Known as "ships of the desert" and used since ancient times as four-footed transportation across the sands of Arabia, camels are hugely

popular with Gulf residents, but the field of [camel](#) biology barely existed three decades ago.

Now the UAE now has the most advanced camel research centres in the world, said Abdul Haq Anouassi, the Moroccan director of the [Veterinary Research](#) Centre (VRC) in Sweihan, Abu Dhabi, which breeds camels on a commercial basis and for research.

Research on camel breeding has been driven by the popularity of camel racing in the Gulf and the demand for improved stock, he said.

VRC, which is owned by Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al-Nahayan and Sheikh Hazza bin Zayed Al-Nahayan, two brothers from the Abu Dhabi royal family, is the only centre to perform embryo transfers on a commercial basis, Anouassi said.

It employs four veterinarians, another researcher with a doctorate, and eight technicians, and is home to 1,500 camels, he said.

The Camel Reproduction Centre in Dubai, which is owned by the emirate's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashed Al-Maktoum and houses about 150 camels, is for research only, said Julian Skidmore, the English woman who runs it.

Researchers from the centre participated in the world's first successful cloning of a camel, which was named Injaz and was born in 2009, Skidmore said, and the centre has also produced a "cama," or a camel-llama hybrid.

Female camels only give birth to one baby every two years, which covers the gestation period of 13 months and breast-feeding for a year, as camels cannot be weaned as quickly as cows, Anouassi said.

VRC therefore uses an embryo transfer technique to increase the number of offspring from prized camels, he explained.

"We collect the embryo from the uterus of a she-camel and we transfer it into the uterus of a receiver," said Anouassi, adding that "we take the elite females that won races and we try to produce the maximum we can."

"Instead of giving you one baby every two years, she will give you 10 or 20 in one year. The baby is gestated in a receiver female but with the genetics of elite male and females," he said.

Fifteen camels sold for a total of 2.06 million dirhams (about 560,000 dollars) at an auction organised by VRC in Abu Dhabi last week were all descendants of Jabbar, a famous racing camel owned by the late founder of the UAE, and were all the result of embryo transfers, Anouassi said.

VRC's camels are popular due to the scientific control of their lineage, according to several buyers during the auction, as well as auctioneer Saif Omeir al-Kutbi.

"I came here because it is the best lineage. I can know who is the father and who is the mother," said Mohammad Saeed al-Amiri, an Emirati who owns 100 camels, during the auction.

Camel cloning research at Dubai's Camel Reproduction Centre is continuing, Skidmore said.

"We did a second one that was born this year, from a racing animal," she said, adding that, "we have a few more pregnant now."

VRC is now going ahead with its own research on camel cloning.

"So far we have not obtained any actual viable births" from cloning, Anouassi said. "We published experiences on the embryos we obtained, on the beginning of gestation up to three months, but then they die."

Cloning has implications for camel beauty contests, as a beautiful camel that has aged could be cloned, Anouassi said. Camel beauty contests are popular throughout the Gulf.

VRC is also conducting research on artificial insemination for camels, which has resulted in live births, but it is not yet used on a large scale, Anouassi said. The Camel Reproduction Centre and VRC both have camel sperm banks.

Interest in camels, which like falcons are a symbol of traditional Gulf Arab culture, does not appear to be waning.

While the world economic crisis saw businesses grind to a halt and commodity prices plunge, camel prices actually rose, said Khalifa al-Nuaimi, the chief executive of Sheikh Hamdan's office.

"We go to many auctions. If I like a camel, I can pay one million or two million (dirhams, or about 270,000-540,000 dollars). This is not a problem," said Rashed Saeed al-Mansouri, whose father owns 55 camels in the UAE and 50 in Saudi Arabia, at VRC's auction in Abu Dhabi last week.

(c) 2010 AFP

Citation: Camel-crazy UAE pioneers cutting-edge breeding technology (2010, September 30) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2010-09-camel-crazy-uae-cutting-edge-technology.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.