

Camelus ferus/bactrianus



Common name: Bactrian camel, two-humped camel

Local name: Havtagai (Mongolian), Wildkamel (German), Jya nishpa yapung (Ladakhi)

Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Artiodactyla

Family: Camelidae

Genus: Camelus

Species: ferus/bactrianus

Profile:

The scientific name of the wild Bactrian camel is *Camelus ferus*, while the domesticated form is called *Camelus bactrianus*. The distinctive feature of the animal is that it is two-humped whereas the Dromedary camel has a single hump. DNA tests have revealed that there are two or three distinct genetic differences and about 3% base difference between the wild and domestic populations of Bactrian camels. They also differ physically. The wild Bactrian camel is smaller and slender than the domestic breed. The wild camels have a sandy gray-brown coat while the domestic ones have a dark brown coat. The predominant difference between them however is the shape of the humps. While that of the wild camel are small and pyramid-like, those of the domestic ones are large and irregular. The face of a Bactrian camel is long and triangular with a split upper lip. The Bactrian camel is highly adapted to surviving the cold desert climate. Each foot has an undivided sole with two large toes that can spread wide apart for walking on sand. The ears and nose are lined with hair to protect against sand and the muscular nostrils can be closed during sandstorms. The eyes are protected from sand and debris by a double layer of long eyelashes while bushy eyebrows give protection from the sun. It grows a thick shaggy coat during winter, which is shed very rapidly in spring to give the animal a shorn look.

Lifespan: 40 years

Distribution: The wild population of the Bactrian camel is presently restricted to four subpopulations in China and Mongolia. The species is found in the Taklamakan desert, the northern slopes of Arjin Shan Mountains and adjacent areas in Lop Nur Wild Camel National Reserve, the Great Gobi Section in Mongolia, the Trans Altai Gobi Desert in Mongolia and the Gashun Gobi (Lop Nur) Desert in Xinjiang, China. Domestic populations are distributed in India, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China. In India, the animals are domesticated in Ladakh district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Population: 600 individuals in China and 350 individuals in Mongolia (IUCN) (Figures are for wild population only)

Behaviour: Wild Bactrian camels are adapted to survive in extremely harsh conditions. The rolling gait of the animal is because it steps forward with both legs on the same side. Speeds up to 65 kmph have been recorded when the animal is under stress. They are believed to be very good swimmers. The animal possesses a keen sense of sight and smell. They are migratory, traveling large distances in search of food and water. Group sizes vary depending on food availability. Generally, the camels travel in groups of 6-20 individuals, led by a single adult male. However, larger groups are often seen around large water sources.

- **Diet:** Bactrian camels are herbivorous. Their diet mainly consists of leaves, grasses and shrubs. They can also feed on thorns, dry vegetation and salty plants. During scarcity of food, the fat stored in the humps is used as a reserve enabling the animals to survive for several days at a time without eating or drinking. But on finding water they may drink as much as 60 liters at once. They can drink salty or brackish water if fresh water is unavailable, thus being the only land mammals with this adaptation.

- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: March-April; Gestation period: 12-14 months, Litter size: 1, rarely 2; Weaning: 1-2yrs, Sexual maturity: males: 5-6 years, females: 3-4 years.

Current status:

- **Status:**
 1. IUCN 2008: Critically Endangered
 2. CITES 2008: Not listed
- **Threats:**
 1. Hunting for local subsistence use.
 2. Habitat degradation by domestic livestock.
 3. Destruction of habitat due to developmental activities like mining, quarrying etc.
 4. Hybridization of the population.
 5. Increased predation by wolves in recent years as a result of reduction in the number of oases due to drought
- **Conservation practices:**
 1. Two reserves have been created to protect the habitat of the Bactrian camels: The 'Great Gobi Reserve A' in Mongolia in 1982, and the 'Arjin Shan Lop Nur Nature Reserve' in China in 2000.
 2. The Wild Camel Protection Foundation (WCPF) has established a captive Wild Bactrian Camel breeding programme in Mongolia in 2003.
 3. The Bactrian camel was one of the top-10 "focal species" of the Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered (EDGE) project in 2007.