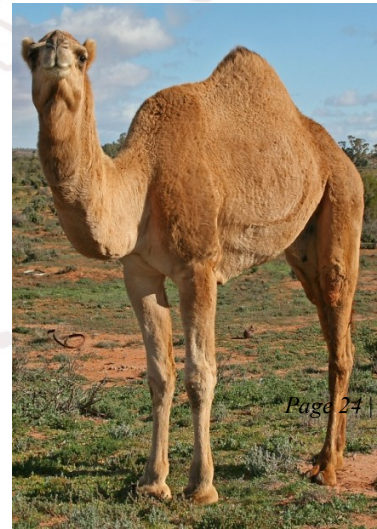


Amphibian Kharai Camels of Kutch

Domestication is a remarkable event that allowed humans to gain an unprecedented power to control their biological resources; the obvious outcome of which is reflected in the diversity of tamed animals and their numerous breeds. Some of these breeds are typically adapted to local harsh environmental conditions. Amphibian Camels aka Kharai Camels of Kutch are indeed a special group of animals which are powered with a unique ability to survive on both, dry land and in the sea. In the water, they are prolific swimmer unlike any other camel. It is also supported by their unmatched ability to feed on saline foliages of the luxuriant mangroves. In Gujarat's Kutch district, primarily in four areas Abdasa, Bhachau, Lakhpat, and Mundra, these animals are painstakingly managed by the Jat community who are nomadic camel herders for many generations. These camels are their means of subsistence and share a close relation of dependence with the herders in a rugged landscape full of hardship. In the arid regions of Kutch, the herders have to cover a long distance to look for mangroves for managing these camel herds. Sometimes they have to survive on camel milk for a few days until they are back to their homes.



Identifying their unique features, Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) distinguished the Kharai Camel as a separate breed in 2015. Moreover, FSSAI (Food Safety and Standards Authority of India) and AMUL (a milk operative) have recognized camel milk as nutritious and branded for its therapeutic properties in diseases like autism, TB, diabetes and even in cancers.

On the flip side, recent enumeration says the number of camels has been dwindling fast and only a few thousands exist. Thinning of supporting mangroves due to heavy industrialization and thus concomitant rise of maintenance cost are the primary causes of concern. Hence, the traditional herders find it really hard to make ends meet. The Kharai Camels have been declared as highly threatened by Government of India and conservations programs are in full swing to increase their population. Unfortunately, the efforts may be only a drop in the ocean. Unless the lifeline of the area - the lush green mangroves - are saved from imminent threats and managed healthily, the fate of Kharai Camels will be sealed along with the several other of inhabitants.

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