

Yak Husbandry in India

Yaks (*Bos grunniens*), found throughout the Himalayan region of south Central Asia, the Tibetan plateau and Mongolia, are herd animals with a long-hair humped. The Yak belongs to the Class Mammalia of the phylum Chordata under the genus 'Bos', Therefore, it is closely related to cattle and is commonly interbreed.

Wild yaks stand about two meters tall at the shoulder. Domestic yaks are about half that height. Both types have long shaggy hair to insulate them from the cold. Wild yaks can be either brown or black. Domesticated ones can also be white.

Domesticated yaks are kept primarily for their *milk* and *meat*. They are also used as beasts of burden, transporting goods across mountain passes for local farmers and traders as well as in support of climbing and trekking expeditions. Often the pack animals are actually crossbreeds of the yak and *Bos taurus* (common domestic *cattle*). These are known in Tibetan as *dzo* or *dzopkyo*.

Yak husbandry in India

The yak-rearing states of India are Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. The first three of these,



bordering the southern slopes of the Himalayas, have a cold, humid climate, while the two northerly states are cold and arid. The total of about 51 000 yaks in 1997 represents a marked decline from the 132 000 yak reported for the year 1977 (Pal, 1993a). Gupta

and Gupta (2000) published even lower numbers of around 40 000 for recent years. Reasons suggested for the decline is socio-economic and hybridization.

Yak types

There are a number of different phenotypic types among Indian yak. The "common" yak resembles medium size hill cattle in conformation; "Bisonian" yak are bigger animals; "Bare-back" yak have a long body and little hair on their backs.

Yak with a particularly hairy forehead, long-haired yak and white yak represent the fourth type described in more detail by Pal et al. (1994). It is not suggested that these types represent different breeds as such as they occur within the same districts or even within herds.

Among the ten colour patterns noted for yak in India, the majority are black (29 percent) or black with white patches (40 percent). Some 15

percent are grey in colour and the remainder of the population is made up of small proportions of brown with white patches, pure white and various mixtures, including piebald and skewbald animals.

Table 1. Pure yak population in the Indian states (from 1997 census) courtesy:ICAR-RC-NEH, Umiam.

States	District	Number	Total	M: F*
Arunachal Pradesh	West Kamang	1 379		1:1.54
	Tawang	6 853		
	West Subansiri	248		
Sikkim	North	4 865	5 346	1:245
		441		
	East	40		
Uttar Pradesh	Pithoragarh	102	318	N/A
	Uttarkashi	175		
	Others	41		
Himachal Pradesh	Chamba	2 365	5 690	1:0.82
	Kinaur	1 321		
	Lahul Spiti	1 997		
	Others	7		
Jammu & Kashmir	Kashmir Div	191	31 379	1:1.04
	Laddak Div	25 662		
	Jammu Div	5 526		

- Ratio of male to female yak.

Yaks engage in various activities in Indian and abroad

Yaks are engaged in various activities in India and abroad. Yaks perform from carrying baggage in high altitude areas India to plough fields in Tibet.

The wild yak is an endangered species. The National Research Centre on Yaks, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Arunachal Pradesh, has completed various research projects on Yak life history. These were Anatomy, Genetics, Nutrition, Physiology & Reproduction, Production & Management and Health. The centre has been focusing ahead in strengthening of the yak husbandry in the region.

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