

Dromedary Camel



Camelus dromedarius

STATUS

- Wild camels are classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN.
- Dromedary camels only exist now in a domesticated form, except for feral populations in Australia (estimates of these range from 25 000 to 200 000).
- Domesticated camels are widespread throughout the world: they are used as beasts of burden, in subsistence farming and camel racing.

ORIGIN

- They are thought to have originated in southern Arabia, then have spread to south-western Asia and northern Africa with development of nomadic cultures and trade routes in the Sahara (circa.1800-4000 BC).

HABITAT

- Camels are extremely well adapted to semiarid to arid plains and deserts.
- They can withstand extremes of temperature (both hot and cold) and water deprivation.
- Camels are grazers (eat grass), but will sometimes browse (eat from branches).

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- Gestation takes 13 months and results in a single calf being born.
- Full independence from the mother is gained at 4 years and sexual maturity is from 5 years of age.
- Lifespan is almost 50 years.

- Humans control the social structure in domesticated camels; in the wild, animals can be seen alone, small or larger groups (troops) and small bachelor troops.

DESCRIPTION

- Camels have a long thin neck, a small head, a slender snout with an overhanging clefted (split) upper lip.
- They are deep chested with a small abdominal waist.
- Long, straight and fine legs, ending in a two-toed footpad. Each leg has numerous pressure pads.
- Dromedary camels have a single hump with the size reflecting nutritional status. (Bactrian camels have 2 humps).
- The tail is small as are the ears. The eyes are equipped with long lashes
- The mature weight is 400-700 kg and height is 2.1 m at the shoulder.
- The coat colour varies from almost white through tans, rust and browns to almost black, and is shed seasonally.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Camels are said to be good swimmers.
- The hump is made of fat and has nothing to do with water storage but is an energy store.
- They can survive for prolonged periods without drinking because they can survive when dehydrated by 40%. They also get moisture from salty plants and water, which other animals would reject. Camels have almost no sweat glands.
- They have good eyesight and a keen sense of smell.
- Their characteristic rolling gait is achieved by moving both legs on the same side of the body simultaneously when walking. (Pacing).