

Bactrian Camel *Camelus bactrianus*

Classification

Related to the Arabian camel, *Camelus dromedarius*. The wild species of Bactrian camel is named *Camelus ferus*, while the domesticated form is considered the *Camelus bactrianus*.

Class: Mammalia
Order: Artiodactyla
Family: Camelidae
Genus: *Camelus*
Species: *bactrianus*

Distribution

The Bactrian camel occupies habitats in Central Asia from Afghanistan to China, primarily up into the Mongolian steppes and the Gobi desert.

Habitat

Asian deserts or grassy steppes where the climate can range from very hot to very cold. Wild camels live in the Gobi desert.

Physical Description

- Bactrian camels are up to 10 feet (3.0 m) long.
- Weigh 1300-2200 pounds (590-1000 kg).
- Wild Bactrian camels are smaller and more slender.
- Their fur color varies from beige to dark brown.
- They have thick, wooly coats that provide warmth during the cold months and insulation from the desert heat, and they shed this for the summer months.
- Bactrian camels have two humps on the back.

Diet

What Does It Eat?

In the wild: Thorny plants, and plants that are salty, bitter and prickly.

At the zoo: Hay and a grain mixture.

What Eats It?

Wolves prey on the Bactrian camel.

Social Organization

Domestic camels travel in groups of up to 20 individuals. The groups are led by a dominant male and include several females, sub-adults and young.

Life Cycle

Camels are sexually mature by five years. Mating occurs year round. After a gestation of 12-15 months females give birth to a single calf weighing up to 100 pounds (45 kg). Calves can stand soon after birth, are weaned at one to two years and stay with the mother until they reach maturity. Life span of the domestic Bactrian camel is approximately 40 years.

Adaptations

Two Humps

Bactrian camels have two humps - like the letter "B". The humps are used to store fat that converts to energy when needed. Bactrian camels are shorter and heavier than the one-humped dromedary camels found in Africa and the Middle East.

"Ships of the Desert"

Bactrian camels have long eyelashes in double rows and a third eyelid which acts like a windshield wiper to wash sand or dirt out of their eyes. Their nostrils can close to provide protection from blowing sand. Their broad, flat feet have leathery pads and two toes on each foot which helps prevent them from sinking into sand or snow.

Big Gulp

Camels have a remarkable ability to survive for long periods (months!) without any water. When camels drink they can drink up to 35 gallons of water at a time. To keep moisture in their body, camels do not sweat very much, and they also have very concentrated urine.

Conservation Connection

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.

Nearly all of the 1.4 million Bactrian camels alive today are domesticated. Wild Bactrian camels are critically endangered with a wild population of fewer than 1,100 remaining in the Gobi desert of Mongolia. Their natural enemies are wolves but the greatest threat to their survival is loss of habitat.

Fun Facts

- Camels can walk up to 30 miles a day
- Bactrian camels are the largest animals in the desert
- These camels can survive in temperatures ranging from 122 degrees to minus 20 degrees.
- Bactrian camels provide nomads in Asia with wool, meat and milk. They also carry heavy loads and provide transportation.
- The humps of a bactrian camel store fat, they do not store water!

