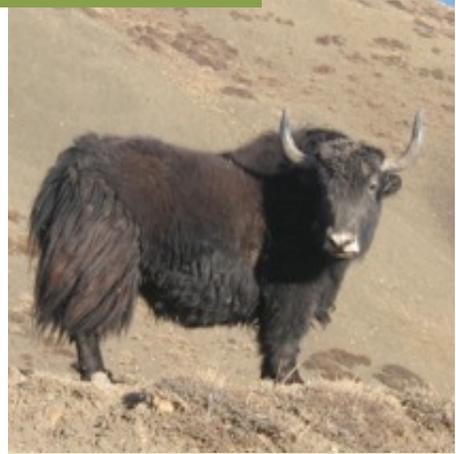


Bos mutus



Common name: Yak

Local names: Brong dong (Tibetan), Ban chour (Hindi)

Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Bovinae

Family: Artiodactyla

Genus: *Bos*

Species: *grunniens/mutus*

Profile:

The scientific name of wild yak is *Bos mutus* while the domesticated form of this animal is called *Bos grunniens*. The coat of the yak is dense, wooly and extremely shaggy, although the colour may differ in domestic yaks. 'Golden' wild yaks are also known but they are very rare. Shoulders of the yak are high and humped and it has a broad, drooping head. The legs are short with broad hooves and large dewclaws as an adaptation to the mountain environment. Both males (95 cm/38 inches) and females have horns though female horns are smaller (51 cm/20 inches). The horns curve from the side of the head, upwards. Yaks range in height from 3-6 feet (0.9-1.8 m). The males are larger than the females. Yaks can weigh from 180 kg to 820 kg. Male yaks are heavier than female yaks. While the sense of smell is extremely refined, sight and hearing are less developed.

Lifespan: 23-25 years

Distribution: Yaks are mainly distributed in the mountain pastures of cold deserts. The countries that are home to these animals are China, India and Nepal. They are also found in the mountain regions of Tibet at an altitude of 3,900-5,850 feet. In India, they are distributed in the Himalayan region. They can best be seen at Chang Chen Mo Valley, Ladakh (Jammu and Kashmir).

Population: Less than 10,000 mature individuals (IUCN) (Figures are for wild population only)

Behaviour: Yaks are gregarious animals, and live in sexually separated herds of 10-40 individuals. They travel large distances in search of food, due to scarce vegetation cover in their habitat. Female yaks and their calves travel in herds. The herd protects the young from predators. In July, there is generally a downward shift from the high plateaus to the lower planes, as mosses and swamp vegetation are at their peaks. In August, the herds shift back to the high plateaus, even retiring in snowy regions to beat the heat. Although yaks are very sensitive to warm temperatures, they can tolerate the cold up to -40°C. If a herd of yaks is disturbed, they flee for long distances, galloping with their tails erect. If something unexpected appears in their way, they bluff, attacking with a fast charge, but normally stop 10-20 m away from the intruder. In spite of their large build, yaks are excellent climbers. Yaks have a unique characteristic of grunting hoarsely and grinding their teeth. Yaks usually wallow in mud during the rut. This shows that Yaks behave very differently from their relatives, the Gaur and Banteng, and sometimes show buffalo or bison characteristics.

- **Diet:** Yaks are mainly herbivores that feast on grasses or leaves of low-lying shrubs and herbs. Like cows, they swallow their food whole (without chewing). Later, they regurgitate the food (which is called cud) and chew it. Like other ruminants, yaks have a four-part stomach.
- **Reproduction:** Mating Season: September-November; Birthing Season: May-June; Birth Rate: 1 every alternate year (in areas of poor grazing, the birth rate may reduce to 1 in 3 years); Gestation period: 258 days; Litter size: 1; Weaning: 1 year; Sexual Maturity: females: 3-4 years.

Current status:

- **Status:**
 1. IUCN 2008: Threatened
 2. CITES 2008: Listed in Appendix I

- **Threats:**
 1. Uncontrolled hunting for meat.
 2. Loss of habitat of wild yaks due to uncontrolled pastoralism (alpine meadows and steppe habitat).
 3. Common diseases in large herds.
 4. Hybridization of yaks.

- **Conservation Practices:**
 1. Yaks have been officially protected by China since 1962.
 2. Yaks are listed as ‘Schedule I’ animals under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972 of India.
 3. They are also listed as ‘Schedule II’ animals in the Jammu and Kashmir Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1978.