

# India's Donkeys

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**In news**– A fall in demand as a beast of burden, and illegal meat and skin trade have caused a critical decline in donkey numbers.

## About Donkeys-

- The domestic donkey is a hoofed mammal in the family Equidae, the same family as the horse. It derives from the African wild ass, *Equus africanus*.
- A male donkey is known as a jack or jackass, a female is a jenny or jennet, and an immature donkey of either sex is a foal.
- Jacks are often mated with female horses (mares) to produce mules; the less common hybrid of a male horse (stallion) and jenny is a hinny.
- The animal finds use in places untouched by mechanisation, like brick kilns, where its small size helps it move quickly through narrow entrances.
- Donkeys are not part of the income-generating milk, meat and fibre production systems in livestock farming. Slaughter of donkeys and trade of their meat and hide is illegal in India.
- Moreover, with more mechanisation across sectors, donkeys now find little use as load-carrying animals. The subsequent reduction in demand reflects in the huge decline in their population.
- In a 2019 study, Donkey Sanctuary India, which works for the welfare of the animal, notes that 4-10 million donkeys are likely slaughtered every year to fulfil demand for the skin in China.
- According to the “20th Livestock Census” released in 2019, India has 0.12 million donkeys – 62 per cent lower than the 0.32 million recorded in 2012. Other equines – mules, horses and ponies – also saw a decrease in

numbers, while the populations of cattle, buffaloes, sheep and goats rose in 2012-19.

## CONSISTENT DROP

Donkey population in India has dropped by nearly 90 per cent in the past three decades



Source: Livestock census from 1992 to 2019

Breed	Native region; characteristics	Use
<b>Kachchhi</b>	Kutch region of Gujarat; grey, white, brown or black in colour	For weed removal in farms and as pack animal during pastoralist migration. It can carry 80-100 kg and pull 200-300 kg on carts.
<b>Halari</b>	Saurashtra region of Gujarat; white in colour, docile temperament	As pack animal during pastoralist migration and to pull carts. It can walk around 30-40 km in a day
<b>Sindhi</b>	Barmer and Jaisalmer districts of Rajasthan; brown in colour	As pack animal to transport water, soil, earthenware, construction material, fodder and to pull carts and for ploughing by small and marginal farmers. They can carry 1,000-1,500 kg.

<b>Spiti</b>	Cold desert areas of Himachal Pradesh; dark brown, brown or black in colour	For immediate transport of highly perishable cash crops and fruits, food grains and other items to far flung areas; to fetch wood, logs and other minor forest produce; and to bring dung or manure from pastures to villages or fields.
<b>Source:</b> Indian Council of Agricultural Research-National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources		