

Kharai Camels

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In news : Rapid industrialisation in Gujarat threatens the mangroves that kharai camels and their nomadic herders depend on

About Kharai Camels

- Known as kharai camels, their name is derived from the local word *khara*, meaning saline.
- **Location:** Kutch, a coastal region of Gujarat, which is also a large desert land, has two camel breeds. **One is the popular Kutchi breed and the other, the Kharai breed**, native to the region.
- The Kharai breed has the special ability to survive on both dry land and in the sea, making it an ecotonal breed.
- Recognised as a separate breed a few years ago by the National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resources (NBAGR), the Kharai camel is probably the only domesticated breed of camel that lives in dual ecosystems.
- NBAGR also certified the breed as ninth camel breed found in India, separating it from Kutchi camel.
- **Feeding:** Kharai camels are known to feed on mangroves on the island off shore. And to eat this salty marine food, they sometimes swim for hours

Its unique abilities

- These camels have a special ability to swim in seawater and feed on saline plants and mangroves, which is how they get their name, Kharai ('salty' in Gujarati).
- Their gently padded hooves help them navigate the wet and salty coastal land with ease and they can swim up to three kilometres (1.8 miles)
- During the rainy season, they swim along the Gulf of Kutch, an inlet of the Arabian Sea, to small forest

islands and graze on mangroves and other saline-loving plants.

- They are also known as dariyataru (meaning sea-swimmer).
- They have adapted to the extreme climate of the desert, shallow or deep-sea waters, and high salinity.

Population:

As per latest counting, the state has 6,200 camels out of which around 2,200 are found in areas such as Lakhpat, Abdasa, Mundra and Bhachau in Kutch whereas the remaining are seen in South Gujarat near Aliya Bet.

Threats:

- Industries in Kutch—salt, thermal power, cement and shipyards, among others—pose a huge threat to the dwindling mangroves.
- Most of these industries require constructing jetties in the sea, which results in the cutting down of mangroves that are fodder for the Kharai camels.
- The increase in salinity throughout the region and the growth of industrial activities has minimised the availability of camel food and water sources

Conservation status:

- IUCN: Endangered
- WPA 1942- Schedule I