



# Camelus dromedarius

Common name: **Dromedary**Latin name: **Camelus dromedarius**

Local name: جمال، ابل



## INTRODUCTION

The dromedary camel is a large mammal, found in arid and semi-arid areas. The distinctive features of the camel are its long, curved neck, narrow chest and single hump, thick, double-layered eyelashes and bushy eyebrows. They have sharp vision and a good sense of smell.

Camels are thought to have been domesticated as early as the 4th millennium BC. Cave paintings with camels were discovered in Sahara, dated at 3000 BP – 2000 BP. Camels are an important domestic animal in many parts of the world, being reared as a multi-use animal; a source of food in their meat and milk, as well as pack and riding animals.

In Sudan, camels are raised almost exclusively by nomadic tribes. They are classified into pack camels and riding camels, depending on their attributes and use, and the local breeds are generally named after the tribes that raise them.

## LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

### Human interaction

Camels are highly prized by the tribes that herd them, and for good reason. Camels are multipurpose animals; they are used for riding, carrying heavy loads, drought work, and their meat, milk, hide and even their urine are used for food, leathercrafts, and medicine.

The Sudanese camel breeds are often named after the tribes that raise them. They are classified into riding breeds, which are smaller and faster, and pack breeds which are bigger and are a source of meat and milk. There are also breeds that are used for both.

The use of camel for riding and racing is a common and popular activity in Sudan, as in many other countries. The Sudanese breeds are appreciated by the racing lover from Gulf countries. For riding the traditional saddle is placed on the hump, contrary to other countries, as Tuareg place the saddle in front of the hump, and Bedouins place the saddle behind the hump. A special palanquin is implemented on the camel in weddings to carry the bride. The use of camel for agricultural work is also common: for water extraction, sesame oil-press or packing.

Camel milk and urine is used for local medicine. Camel's urine has anti-diabetic, anti-cancer, antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal properties, while their milk is rich in health-beneficial substances, which could help in the treatment of some important human diseases like tuberculosis, asthma, gastrointestinal diseases, and jaundice. Camel milk has also been used to treat cancer, and studies suggest that it can lower the number of cancer cells present in the blood.

### Cultural value

Camels are an important asset in social status for many tribes in Sudan. They are used in camel racing events, and gifted as highly prized trophies. The camel breeds and numbers are all important to the *abbala* (camel rearing) tribes. Sudanese camels have participated in *hajan* races in other countries.

### History

Camels were have been vital in transport and commerce in Sudan. Caravans and military campaigns alike have depended on them, as they were the most suited means available to crossing the treacherous desert in the north of the country. The desert guides hired for travel between Egypt and Sudan, were almost exclusively camel-rearing nomads.

Camels were so prized that some bandits known as *hambata* who inhabited the *Butana* region took to the profession of exclusively stealing them from wealthy individuals, travelling as far as Kordofan and Darfur in their quests. Records mention that this persisted as late as the early 20th century.

Gordon Pasha reportedly traveled all over the Sudan during his post as Governor-General on a *Bishari* camel.

The military campaigns in Sudan in the late 19th century employed a battalion known as the Camel Corps, or *Hajjana*. Formed in 1883, it was composed of irregular Egyptian and Sudanese soldiers, and were first used in the Gordon relief expedition in 1884-1885, and in later in the reconquest of Sudan. It became an official unit in the Sudan defence force from 1925 until the 1950s.

The postal system in Sudan also depended on camel riders, and this was depicted on a postage stamp printed in the year 1927.

### Cultural expression

الجمال ما يشوف عوجة رقبتو

(Lit.: The camel does not see the curve of its neck)

Used as a metaphor for a person that points out the flaws of others while oblivious of their own flaws

الكلاب تنبح والجمال ماشي

(Lit.: The dogs bark and the camel walks)

Used as advice to continue working despite other people's criticism

Camels also appear in poetry as a source of pride

## THREATS

Since dromedary camels are domesticated they have no special conservation status. However, wild populations are threatened by habitat loss.

## ECOLOGY

### Type:

Domesticated

### Role in Ecosystem:

Camels help shape and sustaining their habitats. By feeding on a diverse number of plants, camels aid in vegetation growth and help promote biodiversity.

## HABITAT

The dromedary camel is highly adapted to the desert, with the scorching heat, sandy soil, dry climate, and freezing nights. It is found in arid lands in Africa and Asia. In Sudan, they are found almost all over the country.

Interestingly, paleontology research has shown that the same adaptations that enable the camel to live in deserts today has helped it survive in the frozen tundras during the ice age in the distant past.



### Food

Herbivore

Camels feed on different plants in the summer and rainy seasons. They have a preference for *Acacia sayal*. They are known to consume a plant that grows in the rainy season, dubbed camel thorn. Indeed, camels seem to favor thorny plants, which they consume with help of their tactile lips. They also reportedly eat all parts of the watermelon plant.

While camels are not picky with their diet, they will avoid the *Colocynth*, as well as other bitter tasting plants.

Camel humps store fat, allowing them to survive for up to 30 days without food.



### Movement and Communication

#### Communication:

Camels communicate with each other with many sounds, such as moans and loud bellows.

#### Movement:

Camels move both legs on one side of the body at the same time, creating a swaying gait, which is the reason the camel is often dubbed the "ship of the dessert". Camels can run at speeds reaching 40 miles (65 km) per hour.



### Social Habits

Social

Camels are social animals that live in groups, called herds. The herd consists of a dominant adult male, females, and their young, and can reach to around 20 animals. Other males that have been chased out of the group form bachelor herds. The male has a soft palate (*dulaa* in Arabic) nearly 18 cm long, which he inflates to produce a deep pink sac. The palate, which is often mistaken for the tongue, dangles from one side of the mouth and is used to attract females during the mating season.



### Reproduction

Viviparous

Camels mate annually, peaking in the rainy season.

Females bear a single calf after a gestation period of 15 months. The newborn is able to walk within half an hour after it is born. The mother continues to nurse her young for 10 to 18 months.

Camels reach sexual maturity at 6 years, and full adult size when they are about age seven.

### Attributes

#### Appearance:

The dromedary is large, with a long neck and legs. It has a single hump, which is at least 20 cms high. Since it stores fat, the size of the hump varies, depending on the camel's feeding, and will shrink if the camels has gone a very long time without eating. The coat is generally brown but can range from black to nearly white. The hair is long and concentrated on the throat, shoulders and the hump. The eyes are large with long eyelashes, and the ears are small and rounded. The feet are flat and have two toes each.

#### Size:

Adult males stand 1.8–2.4 m (5 ft 11 in – 7 ft 10 in) at the shoulder, while females are 1.7–1.9 m (5 ft 7 in – 6 ft 3 in) tall.

#### Weight:

Males typically weigh between 400 and 690 kg (880 and 1,520 lb), and females weigh between 300 and 540 kg (660 and 1,190 lb).

#### Lifespan:

The camel can live up to 50 years

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