



Ovis aries

Common name: Domestic Sheep

Latin name: *Ovis aries*

Local name: ضأن/غنم



ECOLOGY

Type:

Domesticated

Role in Ecosystem:

Sheep help control invasive plant species, and may also prevent wildfires. Their manure enriches the soil with nutrients.

HABITAT

In Sudan, sheep are reared all over the country, especially at the central and western regions, where there are plenty of natural pastures.



Food

Herbivore

Sheep are grazing herbivores. They feed on pasture plants. In some areas, they are fed concentrates like grain (sorghum) or even dates in order to gain weight.



Movement and Communication

Communication:

Sheep use body language, vocalizations (bleating), and even scent to communicate with one another.

Movement:

Sheep move and graze as a unit, often spreading out but staying within sight of each other.



Social Habits

Social

Sheep are highly social and have a strong flocking instinct, meaning they prefer to stay together for safety. Sheep tend to follow each other, often moving in the same direction as the group. This is a survival strategy to avoid predators. Sheep get anxious when separated from their flock, as they rely on group cohesion for security.

Reproduction

Viviparous

Ewes give birth between the ages of 13 and 15 months, and can lamb several times per year. The gestation period is around 150 days. Sheep reach puberty at 7–12 months.

Sheep milk is richer in fat than goat and cow milk.

Attributes

Appearance:

The most distinctive features of Sudanese sheep breeds are the shape of the head, face and tail, and posture. The forehead is convex and slopes downward into a Roman nose. The ears are rather large and flabby.

Sudan Desert sheep are generally described as long-legged with fat tails, while Watish and Dobasi breeds are smaller with thin tails.

Sudanese sheep are covered in hair instead of wool. The color ranges from sandy, brown to black and white.

Some breeds are horned.

Size:

Height at withers: 66-80 cm

Weight:

Desert sheep: 46-90 kg

Watish/Dobasi breeds: 19-50 kg

Lifespan:

10-15 years

INTRODUCTION

The domestic sheep is a small ruminant domesticated for its meat and coat. It is thought to have been domesticated around 10,500 years ago.

In Sudan, most sheep are owned by nomadic tribes. Their meat is consumed locally and exported to neighboring countries. The most common breed in Sudan is the Sudanese desert sheep, sometimes named after the tribes that raise it, the Watish breed and Dobasi breed.

LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

Human interaction

In Sudan, sheep are an important source of meat, both for local consumption and export. The diet of fresh grass from natural pastures, as well as the fat content give mutton its distinct flavor.

In addition to meat, sheep milk is consumed, though to a lesser degree than cow and goat milk. Sheep fat is melted, clarified, and used as the main ingredient for *dihn*, a traditional hair and body pomade.

Cultural value

Sheep are reared primarily for their meat and hide.

They are also given by some tribes to pay blood money, and are slaughtered for religious purposes such as Eid al-Adha, or happy occasions like weddings, having children, return from Hajj, building a new home, or recovery after illness.

The tribes inhabiting the Medob mountains of West Sudan had a now-obsolete, 3-month long pagan coming-of-age celebration known as *Parja*, which was held after harvest season and until winter. In this ritual, young boys will apply *dihn* made from sheep fat on their hair, braid it, then parade through the village's neighborhood while beating on drums. The inhabitants will offer them sheep, as every participant must slaughter one, keeping the fur and dyeing it red.

Cultural expression

Describing a man as a *kharooof* (sheep) means that he is easily influenced by females and tries to win their favor.

THREATS

Sheep populations in Sudan are threatened by water shortages, diseases, parasites, and inability to reach grazing lands due to human conflict.

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