

# FACTSHEET



## Ass (Asiatic Wild)



**Order:**  
Perissodactyla

**Family:**  
Equidae

**Species:**  
Equus hemionus

**Size:**  
Shoulder height - 1.1 - 1.2 m

**Weight:**  
160-260 kg

Habitat: Grassy steppeland and semi desert

**Life Span:**

about 28 years

**Gestation:**

11-12 months (one foal only)

**Distribution:**

Southern and south- western Mongolia

**The Mongolian wild ass:**

All the above details relate to the 'typical' race of Asiatic wild ass which lives in Mongolia. The Mongolian wild ass (or kulan) is also known as the dziggetai. It inhabits the steppelands of southern and south-western Mongolia, although it may also exist across the frontier in the Chinese province of Sinkiang.

The Mongolian ass is one of four very similar races of the Asiatic wild ass still surviving in the remoter regions of the vast continent of Asia. A fifth race, the Syrian wild ass, is now believed to be extinct, as it has not been reliably reported since 1927.

The three other races include the following:

**The Tibetan wild ass:**

(or kiang) is scattered through the high mountainous plateau of Tibet, from Kokonor in Tsinghai to the headwaters of the Indus.

**The Persian wild ass:**

(or onager) may be found in northern Iran and in the Badkhyz Reserve in Turkmeniya, part of the former USSR. This reserve was specially established for the protection of the wild ass in 1941. They may also be found on an island in the Aral Sea.

**The Indian wild ass:**

(also known as the chor-khar or khur) is now quite seriously endangered, and the last survivors of this race occupy an area of salt-plain in the Little Rann of Kutch, on the India/Pakistan frontier with possibly a few more additional survivors still living in south-eastern Iran.

**Appearance:**

There are slight variations of colouring among the races of wild ass but generally they have a greyish or brownish coat with a pale muzzle, belly and flanks. They have a coarse, erect, darker mane and a fairly short tufted tail with a black tip. Their legs are often lightly striped like a zebra and they have long ears.

**Wild ass habits**

They are very wary animals and do not like to be approached so they avoid human communities. They live in small groups of 6-12 animals consisting of an adult male (a stallion), several females and their young (up to 2 years old). In the autumn and winter these small groups come together to form a herd of several hundred animals.

**Food:**

This herding is possible because it is in the winter that the desert plants flourish providing the asses with lots of food and moisture. It is during the summer that they have to disperse again in order to seek water and the more scant vegetation. During the summer months they never move more than about seven or eight miles from water. Their diet therefore varies throughout the year from grasses and sedges in the spring to herbs such as the tansy and bushes.

**Habitat:**

Asses live in desert or semi-desert areas, steppeland (grassy plains) and mountainous regions. They prefer hilly areas but will come down into the valleys to avoid dust and snow storms.

**Breeding:**

A female ass (mare) is ready to breed at two to three years old. She is then likely to have one foal every two years. The rut or courtship takes place in spring or summer depending on the region. The stallions become very excited, racing around and fighting before mating with the females. The foals are born eleven or twelve months later.

**History:**

During the seventeenth century the range of the Asiatic wild ass stretched from the Yellow River of northern China in the east to the Black Sea in the west. Their numbers have been in a decline for centuries although their rate of decline has increased dramatically over the last fifty years or so. The animal has been prized as a source of excellent meat and it has been used for centuries as a beast of burden. It was also, because of its speed and endurance, a prime target for hunters anxious to prove their skill with a bow, spear or, in more recent times, a gun. Parts of the animal are used for a wide variety of purposes - both medicinal and magical - and its hide has also been in great demand. It is hardly surprising considering its value that the four surviving races need our protection now.

**African wild ass:**

We are not sure whether or not there are any truly wild asses left in Africa. They were originally widespread in northern Africa but may now be extinct. There are asses living in the wild in Ethiopia and Somalia but it is thought that these may be feral populations (domestic animals gone back to the wild).

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