

# Argali

The Himalayas are home to a diverse array of animal species, many of which are unique to the region. Some of the iconic animals found in the Himalayas include the Bengal tiger, snow leopard, Himalayan black bear, and red panda. The region is also home to several species of wild goats, such as the markhor and the ibex, which are adapted to living in steep, mountainous terrain. Additionally, the Himalayas are an important breeding ground for migratory birds, with over 900 species recorded in the region. The biodiversity of the Himalayas is under threat from habitat loss, poaching, and climate change, among other factors. Conservation efforts are underway to protect the region’s animal biodiversity, but much more needs to be done to ensure the long-term survival of these species.

## Argali

SL NO	Characteristics	Description
1	Common Name	Argali
2	Scientific Name	Ovis ammon
3	Length	1.7 – 1.9 metres
4	Colour	Dark brown with a white underbelly and rump
5	Height / girth	1.1 – 1.3 metres at the shoulder
6	Tail length	10 – 15 cm
7	Height till shoulder	1.1 – 1.3 metres
8	Average weight	100 – 200 kg
9	Food habits	Herbivorous; feeds on grasses, shrubs, and other vegetation

10	Habitat	Mountains and high plateaus in central Asia
11	Interesting facts	The argali is the largest wild sheep in the world, and males have impressive curved horns that can weigh up to 20 kg. They are also excellent climbers and can scale steep mountain slopes with ease. However, they are threatened by habitat loss and hunting, and some subspecies are critically endangered.

## Features

Argali, also known as the mountain sheep, is a species of wild sheep that inhabit the mountainous regions of Central Asia, including Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan. The males and females of Argali have different physical characteristics.

The males, also known as rams, are generally larger than females and have a distinct appearance. They have a thick coat of woolly fur that varies in colour from light brown to dark grey or brown. The males have large curved horns that can grow up to 180 cm in length and weigh as much as 23 kg. Their horns are used for defence against predators and in fights for dominance during mating season.

The females, also known as ewes, are smaller than the males and have a shorter, finer coat of fur. Their horns are much smaller and less curved than the males, and they typically weigh between 50 and 90 kg.

One of the most distinctive features of Argali is their adaptability to the harsh mountain environments. They can survive in extreme temperatures and altitudes, grazing on tough vegetation in the rocky terrain. They are also known for

their excellent eyesight, which helps them detect predators from a distance and avoid danger.

Argali are social animals and live in groups known as herds. During the mating season, the males will engage in fierce fights to establish dominance and win the right to mate with females. The males will charge at each other at high speeds and collide head-on with their horns, producing loud cracking sounds that can be heard from a distance.

## Food Habits

Argali are herbivores and primarily feed on a variety of grasses, herbs, and shrubs. They are well-adapted to feeding on tough vegetation in their high-altitude habitat, and their diet may vary depending on the season and availability of food. They also have a unique digestive system that allows them to extract maximum nutrients from their food.

## Habitats

Argali is a species of wild sheep that is found in the mountainous regions of Central Asia, including Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan. They are typically found at elevations ranging from 1,500 to 5,500 metres above sea level, in rugged terrain that is often rocky and barren. Argali prefer open grassy or rocky slopes, and they are adapted to withstand harsh and extreme climates.

In India, Argali is found in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir. They are found in the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas, including the Changthang plateau, which is located at an altitude of over 4,500 metres above sea level. Argali is a Schedule I species under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which means that they are afforded the highest level of protection in India.

# Vulnerable Species

Argali is a Schedule I species under the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which means that they are afforded the highest level of protection in India. However, there is limited information available on the population size of Argali in India, and it is considered a vulnerable species in the country.

The main threats to Argali populations in India are habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation. Human activities such as agriculture, mining, and urbanisation have led to the destruction of their habitat. The competition with domestic livestock for food and grazing resources has also been a major threat to Argali populations in some regions.

Illegal hunting and poaching also pose a significant threat to Argali populations in India, as their meat and horns are highly valued. Poaching activities are difficult to monitor in the remote and rugged terrain where Argali lives, making it challenging to protect them effectively.

According to a 2019 study published in the Journal of Threatened Taxa, the estimated population of Argali in India is around 1,000 individuals. However, this number is uncertain and may vary due to the lack of available data on the species.

## Protected Areas

Hemis National Park is located in the eastern part of Ladakh and covers an area of over 4,400 square kilometres. It is the largest national park in India and is known for its high-altitude landscape, including glaciers, mountains, and valleys. Hemis National Park is home to a variety of wildlife, including Argali, snow leopard, Tibetan wolf, and Eurasian brown bear.

Changthang Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the northern part

of Ladakh and covers an area of over 1,600 square kilometres. It is a high-altitude sanctuary that is home to a variety of wildlife, including Argali, Tibetan antelope, Tibetan wild ass, and snow leopard.

Karakoram Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the eastern part of Ladakh and covers an area of over 1,400 square kilometres. It is a high-altitude sanctuary that is home to a variety of wildlife, including Argali, snow leopard, Tibetan wolf, and Himalayan black bear.

## **Steps needed to protect the Himalayan wild animals**

Protecting the Himalayan wildlife is crucial to ensure the survival of several endangered and unique species found in the region. Here are some steps that can be taken to protect Himalayan wild animals:

**Establish protected areas:** Setting up protected areas like national parks, wildlife reserves, and sanctuaries can provide safe havens for wild animals to thrive.

**Enforce strict laws and regulations:** The government can implement and enforce laws and regulations that prohibit poaching, hunting, and illegal trade of wildlife products. Such laws can act as a deterrent and help reduce the number of wildlife crimes.

**Increase community involvement:** Engaging local communities in wildlife conservation efforts can help to build a sense of ownership and responsibility towards protecting the wildlife. This can include education programs, awareness campaigns, and opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

**Promote responsible tourism:** Responsible tourism can generate income for local communities and promote conservation efforts. However, it is important to ensure that tourism activities do

not harm the natural habitat of wild animals.

**Address climate change:** Climate change is a significant threat to the Himalayan wildlife. Addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting sustainable practices can help to protect the wildlife and their habitats.

**Collaborate with international organizations:** Collaborating with international organizations can provide additional resources and expertise to help protect the Himalayan wildlife. This can include support for research, conservation programs, and policy advocacy.