

SAVING THE CAMELS

“Saving the camels” is drawing attention in few countries where either population is on decline or camels die of toxicity or plastic pollution. However, to a lesser extent camels are saved from road accidents also by putting several signboards at camel crossing prone areas and imposing fine if camels are hit by automobiles. The present large camelid population in the world is probably more than 40 million**. The Indian dromedary camel population is still in decline, especially since the 2010s, a reverse trend developed in China. In countries marked by a regular or drastic decline of their camelid population, a tendency to re-increase has been in force since the beginning of the century, except in India**. It needs an urgent population crisis management at government level. While deciding the policies to save the camels in India, it should be pondered upon that how best the population sustainability and a gradual increase in camel population is taking place in other countries including China. The camel population in India is in mortal decline. The economic benefits of rearing a camel have all but disappeared. The road network in Rajasthan has grown by almost 30 times since 1951, slowly but surely eliminating the need for the “ship of the desert”. Camels, or camel carts carrying people or goods – so common even a few decades ago – can rarely be seen now. Till the 1960s, Civil Administrative officers in Rajasthan routinely toured their districts on camels. Camel owners in India perhaps lost interest in rearing and breeding camels because of poor economical returns. In fact, the effort made by the Government of Rajasthan – enacting The Rajasthan Camel (Prohibition of Slaughter and Regulation of Temporary Migration or Export) Act, 2015 – has had just the opposite effect. Forced by economic reality, the Raika sold their camels to any buyer, including those whom they suspected of buying it for meat, and even sold in grey market for a meagre price. The ban has benefitted only the meat traders and corrupt officials. Camels in India are unlikely to survive as just milch animals either, despite the many demonstrated benefits of camel milk, for several reasons. Neither production nor demand could possibly sustain an economically successful dairy model*. The dromedary camels in Arabian Peninsula are best thriving as a race animal which is additionally used for meat and milk purposes also. These camels are surplus as feral camels in Australia where their use is not much exploited.

A group of scientists recently published papers on plastic pollution. Camels residing in the UAE are experiencing a regional 1% mortality rate from ingesting plastic pollution***. Polybezoars, the tightly packed collection of indigestible materials, which can include plastics, ropes other litter and salt deposits, that is trapped in the stomach or digestive tract, forming a large stone-like mass, lead to gastrointestinal blockages, sepsis from increased populations of gut bacteria, dehydration and malnutrition.

It is imperative to discuss the pertinent topic “Saving the camels” through this platform to bring a growing awareness among the cameleers, camel scientists and government authorities for saving this desert creature.

(*Decline in India’s camel population is worrying written by Rajiv Mehrishi, former civil servant, Rajasthan cadre, The Indian Express, July 7, 2022; **Faye, B. How many large camelids in the world? A synthetic analysis of the world camel demographic changes. Pastoralism 10, 25 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13570-020-00176-z>, ***(Marcus Eriksen, Amy Lusher, Mia Nixon and Ulrich Wernery. The plight of camels eating plastic waste. Journal of Arid Environments, 2021; Volume 185)



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