

Asiatic Wild Buffalo

Bubalus arnee



Pic courtesy: Ritu Raj Konwar

A critically endangered species, interbreeding with domestic buffalos is leading to the extinction of the Asian Wild Buffalo.

It is a large ungulate and a member of the bovine subfamily and the ancestor of all the abundant domestic Water Buffalo varieties and breeds which have descended from it.

Large, slate-black and robust, with flat sweeping horns, the Wild Buffalo, due to its unpredictable nature, is considered to be one of the most dangerous animals to encounter. The buffalo snorts, stomps its feet, and shakes his head as it prepares to charge. It is a sleeker, heavier version of the domestic buffalo and has the largest horns on any animal in the world.

The IUCN Red List of threatened species classifies "Wild Asian Water Buffalo" (*B. arnee*) as an endangered species. The total number of wild Asian Buffalo left is thought to be less than 4,000, which suggests that the number of mature individuals will be less than 2,500, and is continuing decline. The severity of the threats, especially hybridization with the abundant domestic water buffalo is leading to genetic pollution.

The domestic Water Buffalo, although derived from the Wild Asiatic Water Buffalo, is the product of thousands of years of selective breeding carried out by ancient Asian civilizations, especially in India.

The Asiatic Wild buffalo is the most powerful yet the most proportionate of the South Asian bovines. It is one of the most magnificent animals in the world. Seals of the Indus valley civilization (2500 B.C.) depict the wild buffalo, revealing its wide distribution across the subcontinent.

In Asia, the population of wild Water Buffalo has become sparse, and there is fear that no pure-bred wild water buffalo exists. Interbreeding with domesticated buffaloes has posed a serious problem to the population in Assam and it is believed that the highly endangered population found in Central India (Madhya Pradesh) is of a purer strain.

Adult water buffalo range in size from 300 kg to 600 kg for the Domestic Buffalo. In the wild, wild Asian water buffalo can weigh up to 800 kg for females, and males, 1200 kg. They can stand as tall as 1.8m at the shoulder, and stretch up to 2.9m in body length. However, the wild buffalo sub-species found in the Assam state of Northern India, where they inhabit monsoon forests along the foothills of the Himalaya, are notably larger. Here, the average weight of a wild adult buffalo is 900 kg, with the male a bit larger than the female. The average height at the shoulder for a male is about 1.7m, and may reach even 2 metres. These wild buffalo, mostly found in the forests of Kaziranga and Manas national parks, both of which are UNESCO world heritage sites. They have also been known to spread into the northwestern region of the neighboring country, Myanmar.

With the establishment of the 20,000 km². Hukaung Valley tiger reserve in 2004 in Myanmar, the largest ever protected wildlife reserve, now these huge wild buffalo may have the hope of long-term survival: Buffalo are believed to have originated in South Asia. Today, outside India, the true wild water buffalo can only be found in Thailand in extremely low number of about 50 individuals, and in the Annamites range (also called Truong Son range) forests running along the border of Vietnam - Laos -Cambodia. Populations found elsewhere in Asia are feral breeds, not true wild water buffalo. These species were introduced to Argentina and Bolivia:



Pic courtesy:Dr. Manoj Sindagi