

# Yak

*Bos grunniens/mutus*

**Class:** *Mammalia*

**Order:** *Artiodactyla*

**Family:** *Bovidae*

**Characteristics:** Yaks are incredibly large terrestrial mammals. Females usually weigh 650-800 pounds, with the males reaching weights up to 2,200 pounds. Male yaks can be up to 11 feet long and stand 7 feet tall ([Animal Diversity](#)). Wild yaks have very long, thick blackish brown fur covering most of the body, including the tail. They have long upward curving horns that are grayish white in color and can be up to 3 feet long. Yaks have large lungs and a high red blood cell count to breathe better at high elevations. The yak has often been described as a bulky, sturdy animal ([Encyclopedia of Life](#)).

**Behavior:** Wild yaks are herd animals, living in herds from 10-30 individuals and sometimes up to 200 yaks. Yaks will spend most of the day [grazing](#). Females and males usually live separately except during breeding season. Yak will migrate to lower elevations during the winter, but do not tolerate warm temperatures well. If threatened, yaks will run away or they will snort and charge as a threat display ([Arkive](#)).

**Reproduction:** During mating season, males will compete violently for access to females. Yak individuals reach sexual maturity between 6-8 years of age. In the wild, females will give birth to one calf every other year. The gestation period for yaks is about 9.3 months. The young can stand and walk within hours after birth. The calf will be weaned around one year of age, but will not reach full size until the age of 6-8 years. Female yaks care for the young ([Animal Diversity](#)).

**Diet:** Wild: Grasses, mosses, and lichens

Zoo: Hay

**Conservation:** [IUCN Redlist](#) lists the wild yak as vulnerable. The population has decreased greatly in the last 30 years. The number of individuals is believed to be as low as 10,000 individuals. Poaching is considered the most serious threat to the yak population. Other general human disturbances are also a threat. Humans are shrinking the range of the wild yak very quickly. They are already regionally extinct in Bhutan and Nepal.

**FYI:** Unlike other bovids, the yak and its manure have little to no detectable odor, and their wool is odor resistant.



## Range & Habitat:

Limited to the Tibetan plateau, mostly found in alpine tundra and cold desert regions at high elevation.



**Lifespan:** up to 28 years in captivity, 25 years in the wild.

**Special Adaptations:** Yaks are well adapted to cold climates with very thick fur and a low number of sweat glands to reduce heat loss.

## IUCN Conservation Status:

Vulnerable

