

MAMMALS OF SOCOTRA

Mammals (Mammalia)

Mammals are a clade of warm-blooded vertebrates. Among the features that distinguish them from the other vertebrates, the reptiles and the birds are hair, three middle ear bones, mammary glands in females, and a neocortex (a region of the brain).

About 15 species of mammals are known from the Socotra archipelago, but with the exception of the bats (and maybe shrews) all of them seem to have been introduced by man. There are five native bats species (order Chiroptera). One of them, *Hypsugo lanzai*, is endemic.



The **House mouse** (*Mus musculus*) is closely associated with human settlements on Socotra, but it also has free-living form.



The **Socotran asses** are considered to be the feral descendants of animals imported many centuries ago. They resemble in appearance the Nubian Wild Ass (*Equus africanus africanus*), which is considered to be extinct in the wild. A great number of animals inhabit the plains and behave like their wild ancestors.

Introduced mammals

Several exotic species are present by domestic ungulates, carnivorans, rodents and shrews. The carnivorans include domestic cat (*Felis catus*) and the lesser Indian civet (*Viverricula indica*) introduced for its musk which used to be collected for sale abroad. The rodents include black rat (*Rattus rattus*) and house mouse (*Mus musculus*). These species are known to have impacted indigenous species on insular ecosystems worldwide: three out of four are among the world's 100 worst invasives (cats, rats and mice). There are also two species of shrews which include exotic Etruscan shrew (*Suncus etruscus*), the smallest mammal in the world.



The **Black rat** (*Rattus rattus*) originates from moister parts of Asia. It is a versatile, very adaptable animal, an active climber and excellent swimmer, which could be a significant factor in the survival of some natural islands species.

Domestic ungulates

Most numerous among mammals are the **livestock**, which comprise cattle (*Bos taurus*), goats (*Capra hircus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), asses (*Equus asinus*) and camels (*Camelus dromedarius*).



The **Socotran camel** is the same single-humped species, which is found in Arabia. It has become perfectly adapted to the physical conditions of the island, which are not sandy desert in most parts, but sharp rock-set or slippery precipitous ascents. The individuals are of somewhat stouter build and show a goat-like agility and an impressive sure-footedness.

Local **goats** are very variable in coloration of hairs and shape of horns. They are normally free to move around the island, including the capital Hadibo.



There is high impact of goat overgrazing on local ecosystems and biodiversity of Socotra Island. Overgrazing is result of increasing numerousness of goat populations as a consequence of increased demand for meat, change of breeding style and disappearing of traditional nomadic pasturage.



The **Socotran cattle** are well adapted to the harsh island conditions and have distinguishing characteristic from the typical mainland forms, being a dwarf variety without a hump. In colour and form of horns they vary greatly. The cows have small udders, with very short teats.

