



Changthangi Sheep

Nusrat Nabi Khan, Nazir Ahmad Ganai, Tavsief Ahmad, Ruksana Majid, Syed Shanaz and F.D Shiekh

Division of Animal Genetics and Breeding, Faculty of Veterinary sciences and Animal Husbandry, Shuhama Aulestang, SKUAST-Kashmir, 190006

Abstract

Changthangi sheep, also known as Pashmina goats, are a breed of domestic goats found in the high-altitude regions of Ladakh in India. These goats are prized for their fine undercoat, which is used to make the luxurious Pashmina shawls. The breed is facing numerous challenges, including climate change, grazing pressures, and predation. Despite these challenges, Changthangi sheep remain an important part of Ladakh's economy and cultural heritage. This article explores the unique characteristics of Changthangi sheep and highlights the challenges they face in today's world.

Introduction

Ladakh, a high-altitude region in India, is known for its stunning landscapes, rich cultural heritage, and unique flora and fauna. One of the most significant aspects of Ladakh's heritage is its indigenous livestock breeds, which have adapted to the region's extreme climate and harsh terrain. Among these breeds, the Changthangi sheep, also known as Pashmina goats, hold a special place. These goats produce the finest undercoat, which is used to make the world-renowned Pashmina shawls. Changthangi sheep are an integral part of Ladakh's economy and cultural identity. However, these animals face numerous challenges, including climate change, overgrazing, and predation. The purpose of this article is to shed light on the unique characteristics of Changthangi sheep, the challenges they face, and the efforts being made to protect this valuable breed.

Characteristics of Changthangi Sheep

Changthangi sheep are a small breed of domestic goats with a characteristic white or beige coat. They have short, curved horns and a sturdy body adapted to the harsh terrain of the high-altitude regions. What makes these goats special is their fine undercoat, which grows in the winter months to protect them from the extreme cold. This undercoat is incredibly soft and fine, with a diameter of just 12-16 microns, making it one of the finest natural fibers in the world.



The Pashmina wool produced by Changthangi sheep is highly prized for its warmth, softness, and durability. It is used to make a variety of products, including shawls, scarves, and blankets. The process of collecting and processing Pashmina wool is a labor-intensive and time-consuming process that requires a high degree of skill and expertise.

Challenges Faced by Changthangi Sheep

Despite their importance to Ladakh's economy and culture, Changthangi sheep face numerous challenges in today's world. One of the biggest challenges is climate change, which is causing the glaciers and snow cover in the region to melt at an alarming rate. This is affecting the availability of grazing lands for the sheep, which is crucial for their survival.

Overgrazing is another major challenge facing Changthangi sheep. As the human population in Ladakh grows, the demand for grazing lands is increasing, leading to overgrazing and degradation of the fragile high-altitude ecosystem. This is not only affecting the quality and quantity of grazing lands available for the sheep but is also leading to soil erosion and loss of biodiversity.

Predation is yet another challenge facing Changthangi sheep. Wild predators like snow leopards, wolves, and lynx pose a significant threat to the sheep, especially during the winter months when food is scarce. The loss of even a few animals can have a significant impact on the livelihoods of the local communities who depend on these animals for their livelihood.

Efforts to Protect Changthangi Sheep

Efforts are being made to protect the Changthangi sheep and their unique heritage. One of the most significant efforts is the establishment of the Ladakh Pashmina Development Board (LPDB), which works to promote the sustainable development of the Pashmina industry and protect the breed. The LPDB is working with local communities to develop sustainable grazing practices and to promote the use of renewable energy sources to reduce the dependence on firewood, which is contributing to deforestation in the region.

Other initiatives include the establishment of predator-proof corrals to protect the sheep from wild predators and the promotion of eco-tourism as an alternative source of income for local communities. The government is also providing financial assistance to farmers to encourage the rearing of Changthangi sheep and to promote the sustainable use of grazing lands.

Conclusion

Changthangi sheep are not only an important part of Ladakh's economy but also an integral part of its cultural heritage. The Pashmina wool produced by these animals is world-renowned for its quality and is a source of pride for the people of Ladakh. However, the breed is facing numerous challenges,



including climate change, overgrazing, and predation. Efforts are being made to protect this valuable breed, including the establishment of the Ladakh Pashmina Development Board and the promotion of sustainable grazing practices. It is crucial that we continue to work towards protecting the Changthangi sheep and their unique heritage for future generations.

References

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