



CHINKARA

CHINKARA or Chikara (*Gazella bennetti*, Indian gazelle; [Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)), a small antelope of slender build; its tawny coat has poorly marked facial and body stripes. A full-grown male measures about 65 cm at the shoulder and weighs about 23 kg. In body size and weight the chinkara resembles *Gazella gazella* and *Gazella dorcas*, with which it has frequently been confused. The horns of the male appear straight when seen from the front. In profile the horns of an adult male are S-shaped. Females also have horns, though they are much slenderer and smaller than those of males.

The present range of the chinkara extends from south-western India across Pakistan into Persia. It has also been reported from archeological sites within this area of distribution (Uerpmann). The westernmost points of its known occurrence are between Bandar-e 'Abbās and Kermān in southern Persia and as far north as reaching the Dašt-e Kavīr and Gorgān (Groves).

The taxonomic position of the chinkara has been uncertain. J. R. Ellermann and T. C. S. Morrison-Scott considered it to be conspecific with *Gazella gazella*. Later C. P. Groves, J. Lange, and G. B. Corbet, in a review of the cranial characteristics of gazelles, found it to be closer to *Gazella dorcas*. Recent chromosomal studies of the chinkara indicate no connection with either *gazella* or *dorcas*. The chinkara has a much higher number of chromosomes than either of the other two species, and the karyotypes are not closely related. The karyological differences underscore the necessity of establishing *Gazella bennetti* as a distinct species (Furley et al.).



In India and Pakistan the habitat of the chinkara comprises wastelands with ravines, scattered bush, and areas of sparse vegetation (Prater). It is commonly found in the sandy hills of Indian desert zones as well. Little is known about the chinkara in Persia, as no systematic studies have been conducted on its ecology or behavior. Adapted to arid conditions, the chinkara seems to prefer the hot regions of southern Persia, but its habitat is being invaded by human settlements, and competition with domestic animals is threatening its survival.

The chinkara is usually found in small groups. Herd size ranges from two to ten animals (Stockley). G. B. Schaller reported that the average group size of the chinkara population in the Kalabagh Reserve in Pakistan was three, the basic social unit composed of one female and her offspring. Herd structure changes with the seasons, owing in part to the nature of the breeding cycle of the animal, which, according to S. H. Prater, is not limited to a particular season. Observation of the Kalabagh population indicates that the chinkara undergoes a discrete major birth peak in April and a minor one in the autumn (Schaller), which may indicate that the breeding cycle of the chinkara varies from one area to another, depending on environmental conditions.

Like other gazelles, adult chinkara males are territorial and remain in a demarcated plot of ground; they chase other males away but attempt to retain visiting females. The territory is demarcated by fecal mounds, which the male uses repeatedly. A female in estrus is guarded aggressively by the territorial male until copulation takes place, after which the female may join a female band. Females usually conceive while they are yearlings, the gestation period lasting about 165 days. The young may remain with the mother for as long as twelve months, until she has another fawn (Schaller).

The chinkara is shy of human beings; if approached, the animal gives a series of snorts and prances away with a peculiar bounding gait. When alarmed, the herd takes off at a frantic pace, then stops 100-200 m away to discover the cause of the alarm.



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(Khushal Habibi)