



## JACKAL

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**JACKAL**, Golden or Asiatic (*Canis aureus*, MPers. *tōrag*, NPers. *tura*, *šāgāl* [cf. Skt. *śṛgāla-* and related IAr. forms; Mayrhofer, 1976, p. 368]; **FIGURE 1**), a medium-size member of the dog family (Canidae) occurring throughout Afghanistan and Iran. It also extends east through India to Myanmar and Thailand and west through southern Europe to Italy and throughout North Africa, south throughout the Arabian peninsula and East Africa to Tanzania. Weighing 7-15 kg, it has a head and body length of 60 to 106 cm, and the tail measures 20-30 cm. The coat color is variable, but usually golden-brown or brown-tipped yellow; the back is black and gray; the tail is black-tipped. *Canis aureus* is the northernmost of four jackal species. The other three are confined to Africa. Our jackal doubtless has persisted in its present range owing to its adaptation to arid habitats. The most active recent student of jackal biology is Patricia D. Moehlman (1994), whose work has been carried out in Africa. Information specific to Iran and Afghanistan is to be found in Harrington (1977), Hassinger (1968, 1973), Lay (1967), Misonne (1959), and Žiā'i (1996). The type locality for the original description of *Canis aureus* was restricted to "Benná Mts., Laristan [Lārestān] (now in Fārs Province), S. Persia" (Wozencraft, 1993, p. 280).

The jackals usually occur in monogamous mated pairs, sometimes accompanied by yearling young, who assist in hunting and the raising of young. The family group will carry food in the stomach from a large carcass for regurgitation to pups or a nursing mother. Cooperative hunting during the period when pups are provisioned facilitates the killing of hares and



occasionally larger prey, such as young gazelles. In Iran, Afghanistan, and elsewhere in the Middle East, scavenging supplies a small percentage of the diet, especially in habitats away from humans; and carrion consists mainly of road kill and, around villages, garbage. Jackals are omnivorous, opportunistic feeders, eating fruits and vegetables as well as hunting small animals such as reptiles, amphibians, birds and eggs, rodents, and various invertebrates.

The time of mating varies from region to region, but usually occurs sometime from October to February in the area of Iran. Usually, 5-6 pups are born after a 63-day gestation and are nursed for 8-10 weeks. They are born in a den within the pair's defended territory of 2-3 km<sup>2</sup>. Both males and females mark territorial boundaries with urine. Jackals are known to live up to 13 years in the wild when conditions are consistently good. Females are sexually mature at 11 months, males at up to two years, but they may delay mating, particularly those that remain as "helpers" with their family. They are active both day and night, although, where they are in contact with humans, they tend to become nocturnal. Jackals have an extensive vocal repertoire to locate one another, communicate with pups, and in other social interactions. Howling together apparently strengthens the pair's bond.

There are both negative and positive aspects in their interactions with humans. They raid crops and occasionally kill sheep (lambs) and chickens. They may be involved in the spread of rabies. On the other hand, they control rodent and hare populations and often serve an important role in removal of animal carrion and garbage around villages. They play an important role in folklore and fables throughout the Middle East.

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