

periods of deprivation. Therefore, depending on the succulence and availability of feed, the air temperature as well as their acclimatisation to water deprivation, camels can go up to 20 days without water. It is recommended, however, that working camels be offered water (20-40 litres) once every 1-2 days. If they are deprived of water for a long period e.g. 10 days, they should be allowed to spend up to 8 hours drinking water as it takes time to replenish all the body fluids.

Housing

Camels should be protected from both natural and artificial factors that could harm them. These include excessive rain and wind, pests, predators and thieves.

The basic housing unit for camels is a *boma*. This should be sited in a place that is dry and well drained, and protected against strong winds.

Many camels have never seen barbed wire or fences, thus caution must be observed if penning desert camels in wire pens.

Animal health

In order to work, camels must be healthy. The major health problems for

working camels are sores/wounds, lameness, sprains, malnutrition and mange.

Never overload, overwork or beat your camel. Make sure it has enough time to feed and rest. It is easy for overworked and exhausted camel to get serious diseases, which can kill it.

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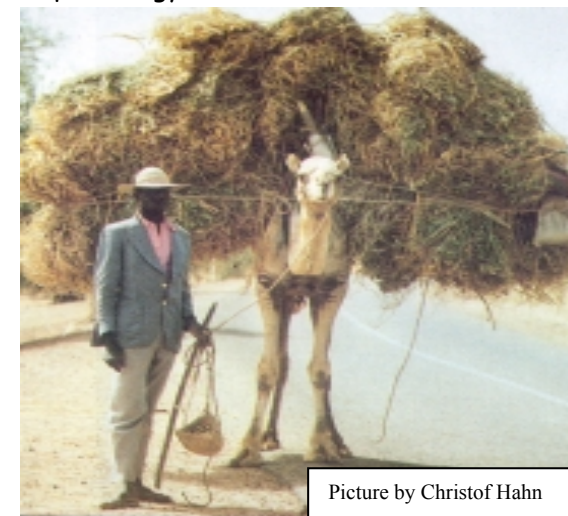


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Selection and Care of Draft Camels

Among camel men, there is a long established tradition of riding camels, but hardly anything on harnessing camel power for farm work. However, the use of camels as draft animals has increasingly gained popularity particularly in arid and semi-arid areas. Due to drought tolerance abilities of camels, people have realised that camels have their place in power industry as a unique energy resource.



Picture by Christof Hahn

Strong camels can carry up to 250kg

Selecting Draught Camels

Generally, a camel may be or may not be suitable for draft use depending on its physical condition, health, nutrition and behaviour. It is advisable to go for local breeds that are adapted to physical and climatic conditions of the area.

Avoid camels that have suffered or are suffering from major diseases, including physical conditions such as lameness. Camels that have old scars or lots of brand marks should be avoided as they may have chronic health problems. A camel that is alert, active and responds calmly to its environment should be selected.



Picture by Chris Field

Camel suffering from mange

Taller camels are a disadvantage for draught purposes because a greater proportion of the 'pull' is dissipated as vertical rather than horizontal force. For this reason, short, stocky camels of sound health are preferred. Body weights would vary depending on breed and environment from 450-750kg.

The draught power of camels can be put to use in cultivating, pulling wagons, carts and sledges. Non-castrated camels are preferred because they are agile and their outbursts of energy is important in draught work, but they can become unmanageable during the wet season when a lot of work is required, unless worked daily. Camels can work at speeds ranging between 2-5km/hr, going for between 6 and 8 hours.

However, camels should not be worked until they reach full body weight, otherwise, it could cause stunted growth. This period varies from 3 years in regions with plenty of good browsing and relative disease freedom to 6 years. Build-up (training) period may start earlier but full work may only be done when bone development is complete.

Feeding Camels

A major requirement for good camel husbandry is availability of suitable browse.

It is important to remember that proper feeding is more than just sending the camels for browsing. They need different types of feed to get their requirements for growth, maintenance, re/reproduction and protection i.e. proteins (e.g. oil seeds), vitamins, minerals and energy foods.

So in circumstances when camels are working long hours and browse is insufficient or not available, it may be necessary to feed them from external sources. This may consist of cut green feed and lopping from trees or grains. This is however in very few cases since camels are extraordinarily versatile in what they can eat. Sometimes they have to be induced to accept that to which they are not accustomed.

Daily food supplements for camels that have no time to graze would be approximately 2kg sorghum, 2kg crushed maize, 10kg of hay and 42 grams of salt. 1kg of oil seedcake should also be added. Rations should be split between morning and evening.

Water requirements

Camels, like all other animals, must have water. On the other hand, they have remarkable mechanisms for conserving water and as such, are incredibly tolerant of long