

# Nilgai

The Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) is one of the largest species of Asian antelope native to the Indian subcontinent. The name 'nilgai' translates to 'blue cow'.

The nilgai has been associated with Indian culture since the Vedic period (1500–500 BC), acquiring a sacred status in Hinduism as a mother animal.

Despite this, they are considered a nuisance animal in some northern states due to crop damage done by them. Some states like Bihar have even classified them as 'vermin'.

This article will give details about the Nilgai within the context of the IAS Exam.

## Characteristics of the Nilgai

The Nilgai is a diurnal animal (active during the day). They band together in three distinct groups. One or two females with young calves are three to six adults.

They are easily recognizable by their sloping back and white patch on the throat, their thin sturdy legs and small mane of hair behind and along the back ending behind the shoulder.

A column of coarse hair - known as the "pendant" - which is around 13 centimetres long in males, can be observed along the dewlap ridge below the white throat patch.

The females are orange or tawny in color while the males are darker with bluish grey in colouring.

Only the males have horns although a few females have them as well.

Further characteristics of the Nilgai is discussed in the table below:

Characteristics of a Nilgai	
Head and Body Length	1.7–2.1 metres
Weight	Males: 109–288 kilograms Females: 100–213 kilograms
Tail Length	54 centimetres
Horn Length	15–24 centimetres
Latin Name	<i>Boselaphus tragocamelus</i>

Habitat	India, Nepal, Pakistan, United States
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## Behaviour and Habitat of the Nilgai

Nilgai are herbivores feeding on grass and herbs. Nilgai are better adapted to interference from livestock regarding forage competition as they can reach high branches and do not primarily depend on ground vegetation.

The preferable habitat of a nilgai is the one replete with short bushes with scattered trees and grassy plains. They are common in agricultural lands as well. However the nilgai is also known to adapt to a variety of environments.

Major populations of the Nilgai are found in India, Nepal and Pakistan. It is found in large numbers across northern India. The Nilgai is tame and will be cautious and timid if alarmed. They generally make short grunts when threatened.



## Conservation of the Nilgai

In the IUCN Red List the Nilgai is categorised as 'Least Concerned In India', the Nilgai is protected under Schedule III of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972. Major protected areas for the nilgai across India include:

- Gir National Park
- Satpura National Park
- Tadoba Andhari Reserve
- Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary,
- Ranthambore National Park
- Sariska Tiger Reserve

The estimated population of nilgai in India is approximately 100,000. The population of Nilgai in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan are so large that they are regarded as a nuisance. The farmers also lose their harvest to Nilgai when they trample their fields.

The situation in Madhya Pradesh got so bad that farmers went on a hunger strike in 2015 demanding compensation for damaged crops.

The state governments of Bihar and Maharashtra have urged the Central Government to declare the animals as 'vermin'. The proposal had been implemented in Bihar where it is legal to hunt the Nilgai to mitigate the damage to crops.

Since the name 'nilgai' has religious significance, the Governments of Madhya Pradesh proposed to rename it as '*rojad*' (forest antelope) in order to make its culling acceptable to the general populace.