

MAMMALS

CHIRU

ABOUT

Chiru are animals that are also known as the Tibetan Antelope (*Pantholops hodgsoni*). The male Chiru has horns 20 to 23 inches long, while the female is hornless; their color varies from beige or light grey to white. The weight of a Chiru is between 57-88 pounds (or 26-40kg). The wool of the Chiru is known as shahtoosh meaning “king of wool”. This wool is the softest, finest and warmest wool in the world. It is estimated that around 20,000 Chiru are killed every year for their wool, which is why they are endangered. The wool is extremely valuable and even though trade of this wool is banned, poachers still get large amounts of money for this much sought after luxury fiber. Because this animal is so shy and therefore impossible to shear, poachers kill three to five chiru to get 10-20 ounces (300-600 grams) of raw wool, which only produces a single shahtoosh shawl. The last count of the Chiru population was done eight years ago and from one million of them at the turn of the century their numbers in 1995 had fallen to 75,000. Experts think that the Chiru now numbers approximately 70,000 in the wild.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Chiru or Tibetan antelope is one of the world’s hardest animals and can survive in extreme temperatures. The Chiru is able to tolerate weather extremes due to the layers of the dense, fine shahtoosh wool next to the skin. Females typically give birth to a single calf in June or July after mating in late November or December. Survival of young in the first year of life is low; at least two-thirds do not survive to the age of two. The maximum lifespan of this animal is up to 8 years. Livestock and Chiru may have to compete for forage (grasses) since their diets are similar and they overlap in the areas they range. Chiru stand about four feet high and make their home in remote areas above 10,000 feet (3,100 meters) on the alpine steppe (plateau) of northwest Tibet in China.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

What type of wool comes from the Chiru?

- a. tibetan mountain
- b. shahtoosh
- c. steppe
- d. hodgsoni

Answer is B.

