

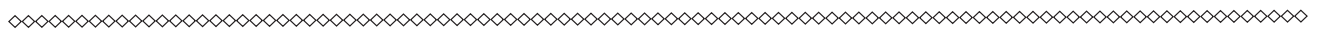
snakes die during catching, extraction, and keeping, while the venomous snakes may die while their fangs are being pulled out/or being burnt off before such public displays, few are injured/ traumatized and it reduces their survival chances. So, all in all 60,000–70,000 snakes die each year around this festival.

Superstitions are again one of the anthropogenic issues that has put a species under great threat. We need to debunk these myths that can potentially drive the population to extinction and disrupt the ecological balance. Strong education and awareness about the ecology and behavior of the species is crucial to dissolve these superstitions and increase peoples’ receptiveness towards the species. More

scientific knowledge about snakes needs to be simplified and shared around the occasions and festivals. Understanding the snakes in the bigger context of ecology is a great possibility for true coexistence.

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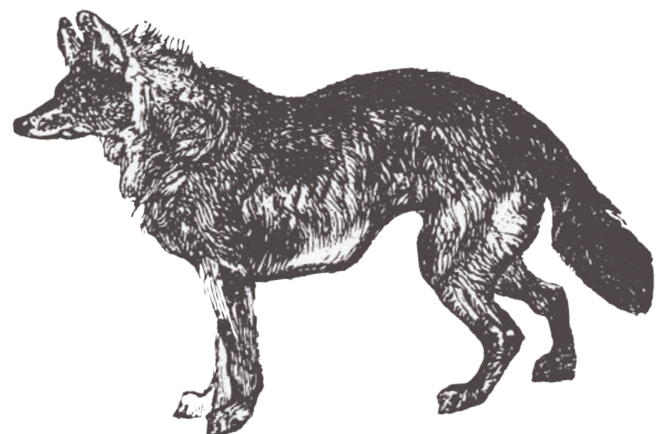
Of the Golden Jackal and Her Horn

If you’ve ever heard of black magic, you might know about voodoo dolls from movies, or noticed lemons and chillies on a string hung on new cars to counter the evil eye. But have you heard of magical superstitions that revolve around wild animals? In India, a biodiversity-rich country, we actually have quite a few. One of the most interesting of these is the myth of the jackal’s horn.

For those who’ve never encountered a jackal, let me describe them to you. Golden Jackals, the species native to India are about the size of a medium-sized dog, with a short muzzle, slightly rounded ears, a black saddle-shaped patch on their backs, and a black tip to their fluffy tails. They get their name from their golden-brown fur. They usually live in closely knit family groups of up to five individuals. They have a broad, omnivorous diet in the wild, and have been documented to scavenge from the kills of larger predators like wolves and tigers, sometimes eating right alongside these larger carnivores, who don’t seem to mind! These shy animals are also capable of coexisting with humans, as their flexible habits let them include garbage dumps in their foraging patches. However, this coexistence can lead to their death because of car accidents, or contracting diseases like rabies from street dogs, or

being poisoned by people for hunting small livestock or stealing fruits from plantations.

So, what do they have to do with black magic? Well, across southern Asia, the folklore of many communities includes the myth that jackals have a small ‘horn’ on the back of their skulls, usually hidden by their fur. This horn is supposed to have many magical properties, such as protecting the owner from evil spirits, bringing good luck and wealth, allowing the owner to see in the dark, granting the owner wishes, and reappearing magically if it’s lost. This makes them a popular item used and sold by black magic practitioners.



Of course, jackals have no horns or any body parts resembling horns, but advertisements for these artifacts are commonly found, indicating the existence of a thriving black market. When some jackal horns were forensically examined, researchers found that they were actually made up of everything from bird talons, dog claws, and cow hooves to fur from foxes, goats, cats, and mongoose. Still, the international trade in jackal horns is widespread enough to potentially be a significant threat to jackal populations, as well as other wild species that might be used to make the fake horns.

Unfortunately, there hasn't been much research on trade in jackal body parts compared to more well-known species like tigers or elephants, which means we don't have much data to understand how pressing the problem is. Jackal poaching continues to slip under the radar because the species is considered to be widespread, common, and adaptable, although it could be part of a much larger wildlife crime network. It is important for the agencies working on wildlife crime to focus on all wild species, and hopefully, studies on where enforcement is needed are carried out sooner rather than later. In the meantime, if you hear anyone talking about jackal horns, be sure to tell them they don't exist and never have!

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