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Radhey Shyam Meena
Animal Husbandry and
Dairying, Dr. Bhimrao
Ambedkar University, Agra,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Ravi Kumar Meena
Animal Husbandry and
Dairying, Dr. Bhimrao
Ambedkar University, Agra,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Khadan Singh Meena
Animal Husbandry and
Dairying, Raja Mahendra Pratap
Singh University, Aligarh, Uttar
Pradesh, India

Jagpal Jogi
Subject Matter Specialist, Krishi
Vigyan Kendra, Danta, Barmer,
Rajasthan, India

Parmar Ankitkumar Dineshbhai
Ph.D. Scholar, Department of
Livestock Production and
Management, Indian Veterinary
Research Institute, Izatnagar,
Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author:
Parmar Ankitkumar Dineshbhai
Ph.D. Scholar, Department of
Livestock Production and
Management, Indian Veterinary
Research Institute, Izatnagar,
Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India

Livestock population dynamics in India: A comparative species-wise trends from 2007 to 2019

**Radhey Shyam Meena, Ravi Kumar Meena, Khadan Singh Meena, Jagpal
Jogi and Parmar Ankitkumar Dineshbhai**

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Abstract

Animal husbandry and the livestock sector play a vital role in India's rural economy by supporting food and nutritional security, employment generation, income diversification and rural livelihoods. India possesses one of the world's largest and most diverse livestock resources, with substantial contributions to both the national and agricultural economy. The present research provides a comparative overview of livestock population dynamics in India based on the 18th, 19th, and 20th Livestock Census conducted in 2007, 2012 and 2019, respectively, with emphasis on major species, emerging trend and regional variations. The total livestock population declined from 529.69 million in 2007 to 512.05 million in 2012 (3.33%), but subsequently increased to 536.76 million in 2019 (4.8%). During 2012–2019, the population of cattle, buffalo, sheep, goats and Mithun increased by 1.3%, 1.1%, 14.1%, 10.14% and 29.52%, respectively. The total bovine population also showed a marginal recovery of 1.30%, increasing from 299.98 million in 2012 to 303.76 million in 2019. The population of milch cattle, buffaloes and goats increased by 10.445, 0.04% and 13.145, respectively, during 2012–2019. In contrast, pig, Yak, camel, horses and ponies, donkey and mules declined by 12.03%, 24.90%, 37.1%, 45.2%, 61.2% and 57.1%, respectively. Marked regional variations were observed reflecting differences in production systems, market demand, environmental adaptability and management practices. The contrasting population trends highlight the changing economic importance of different livestock species and the need for species-specific interventions. Strengthening genetic improvement, scientific management, nutrition, reproductive efficiency, disease control, conservation of indigenous genetic resources, species-specific development programmes and better market support is essential to improve productivity and ensure sustainable livelihoods. Particular attention should be given to declining and under-recognizing species such as pigs, Yak and working equines while consolidating the gains observed in small ruminants, buffaloes and Mithun.

Keywords: Livestock census, livestock population, cattle population, buffalo population, percentage change, livestock development

Introduction

The animal husbandry and livestock sector plays a vital role in strengthening rural livelihood and supporting the economic development of India. The country possesses one of the largest and most diverse livestock resources in the World, which has contributed significantly to human civilization as well as the national economy (Unnati *et al.*, 2019) ^[11]. Livestock production provides a regular source of income and helps reduce seasonal fluctuations in livelihood opportunities, particularly among economically vulnerable rural households (Birthal and Ali, 2005) ^[5]. This sector contributes approximately 4.11% to India's gross domestic product (GDP) and 25.6% to agricultural GDP (Yadav *et al.*, 2021) ^[12] and provides employment to about 8.8% of the total population including small and marginal farmers, women and landless agricultural workers (Singh *et al.*, 2022; Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2018) ^[10, 4]. India possesses the world's largest livestock population, accounting for approximately 59.29% of the global buffalo population and 19.46% of World's cattle population. Globally India ranks first in cattle and buffalo population, second in goat, third in sheep and tenth in camel population (Sharma *et al.*, 2018; Mondal and Mishra, 2022) ^[9, 7]. At global level, the livestock

sector is undergoing continuous transformation, particularly in developing countries such as India, where production systems are evolving in response to the growing demand for milk, meat and other livestock-derived products.

Methodology

The present study was based on secondary data on livestock population in India obtained from 18th (2007), 19th (2012) and 20th (2019) Livestock Census reports of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying (DAHD), Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Government of India. Livestock population data for cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, horses and ponies, mule, camel, donkey, Mithun and Yak, were compiled and comparatively analysed. Category-wise data on milch animals and total bovine population were also considered. Percentages change between successive census periods was calculated to assess population growth or decline. The findings were presented through tables and figures and interpreted in relation to breeding, management, disease, market demand, environmental conditions and government interventions.

Overview of Livestock Population in India

India has witnessed substantial growth in its livestock population, increasing from 292.80 million in 1951 to 536.76 million in 2019. As per the 20th livestock census, the country recorded an overall growth of 4.8% in livestock population during the intercensal period of 2012-2019 (Table 1). However, considerable species-wise variation was observed,

with population changes ranging from a 61.2% decline in donkeys to a 29.5% increase in Mithun during 2012-2019. According to the 20th Livestock Census, released by the ministry in October, 2019, the total livestock population declined from 529.69 million in 2007 to 512.05 million in 2012, representing a decrease of approximately 3.33%. In contrast, the total livestock population increased to 536.76 million in 2019, which showed a 4.8% growth compared to 2012 livestock Census (Fig 1). The total bovine population also showed a declining trend during 2007-2012 (-1.57%), followed by a recovery and increase of 1.20% during 2012-2019. The recent increase in livestock population has been accompanied by improvements in livestock production and the per capita availability of livestock products. Among the states, Uttar Pradesh recorded the highest livestock population, followed by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. While Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan experienced a decline in livestock population growth during 2012-2019. Madhya Pradesh showed an increasing trend. Among the ten major livestock producing states, West Bengal recorded the highest growth rate (23.51%), followed by Telangana (22.27%) and Andhra Pradesh (15.86%) during same period. The relative contribution of different livestock species to the total livestock population across the three livestock censuses are presented in Fig 2. Furthermore, during 2012-2019, the livestock population increased by 4.56% in rural areas and 11.19% in urban areas, indicating a comparatively faster growth of livestock numbers in urban regions.

Table 1: Species-wise population dynamics and growth rate of livestock during 2007-2019

Species/Livestock Census	2007 (Million)	2012 (Million)	2019 (Million)	Growth rate during 2007 to 2012 (%)	Growth rate during 2012 to 2019 (%)
Cattle	199.08	190.90	193.46	- 4.10	+ 1.30
Buffaloes	105.34	108.70	109.85	+ 3.19	+ 1.10
Mithun	0.26	0.30	0.39	+ 12.88	+ 29.50
Yak	0.083	0.076	0.058	- 7.64	- 24.70
Total Bovine	304.76	299.98	303.76	- 1.57	+ 1.30
Sheep	71.56	65.07	74.26	- 9.07	+ 14.10
Goat	140.54	135.17	148.88	- 3.82	+ 10.10
Horses and Ponies	0.61	0.62	0.34	+ 2.12	- 45.20
Mule	0.14	0.20	0.08	+ 43.07	- 57.10
Donkey	0.44	0.32	0.12	- 27.17	- 61.20
Camel	0.52	0.40	0.25	- 22.63	- 37.10
Pig	11.13	10.29	9.06	- 7.54	- 12.00
Total Livestock	529.69	512.05	536.76	- 3.33	+ 4.80

Source: Livestock census, Directorate of economics and statistics and animal husbandry statistics division, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, M/O Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

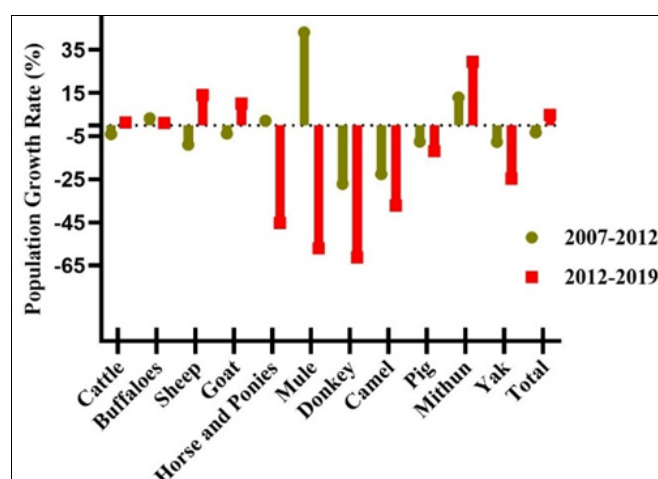


Fig 1: Population growth rate of different livestock species during 2007-2012 and 2012-2019

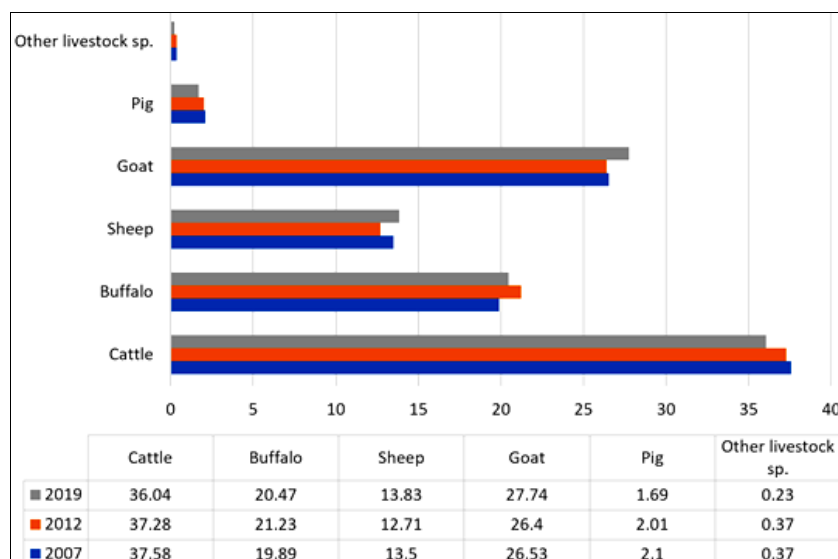


Fig 2: Percentage of contribution of different species in total livestock population

Cattle population

The cattle population was decline from 199.08 million in 2007 to 190.90 million in 2012, representing a negative growth of 4.10%. However, the population subsequently increased to 193.46 million in 2019, showing a growth of 1.3% compared with the 2012 census. A notable shift was observed in the sex-wise compositing of the cattle population. The female cattle (cows) population increased by 6.49% during 2007-2012 and recorded a further substantial increase of 18.06% during 2012-2019. In contrast, the male cattle population declined considerably, by 18.76% between 2000-2012 and by a further 29.99% during 2012-2019 (Table 2). This pattern suggests a growing preference among livestock owners for maintain female cattle, primarily because of their greater productive and reproductive ability. The population of exotic/crossbred cattle increased substantially, by 20.18% and 29.27% during 2007-2012 and 2012-2019 periods, respectively. Conversely, the population of indigenous cattle, including both descript and non-descript animals, declined by 8.94% and 5.99%, respectively, during these two periods. Although a marked reduction in indigenous cattle was observed during 2007-2012, the rate of decline became

comparatively less pronounced after 2012. Among major states, Odisha recorded the highest decline in cattle population (-15.01%), whereas the highest increase of 28.16% was reported in 2019 compared with previous census of 2012. Based on their productive and functional characteristics, Indian cattle breeds are broadly classified into Milch, Drought and Dual-purpose breeds (Rai *et al.*, 2023) [8]. The increasing emphasis on the conservation of native breeds and government initiatives such as the Gokul mission may have contributed to slowing the decline in native cattle population. Nevertheless, data from the last five censuses indicate considerable fluctuations in the growth pattern of India's cattle population. This variation may be associated with several socioeconomic and structural factors, including rapid urbanization, declining availability of agricultural labour and inadequate economic returns from dairying. Although several states have implemented cattle protection legislation for many years, the overall growth of the cattle population has remained inconsistent, indicating that legislative protection alone may not be sufficient to ensure sustained growth and conservation of cattle resources.

Table 2: Category-wise population and growth rates of livestock species during 2007-2019

Species	Category	Population in 2007 (Million)	Population in 2012 (Million)	Population in 2019 (Million)	Growth rate during 2007 to 2012 (%)	Growth rate during 2012 to 2019 (%)
Cattle	Total Females	115.43	122.92	145.12	+ 6.49	+ 18.06
	Total Males	83.6	67.92	47.55	- 18.76	- 29.99
	Exotic/crossbred females	26.2	33.7	46.95	+ 28.63	+ 39.32
	Total Exotic/Crossbred	33.06	39.73	51.36	+ 20.18	+ 29.27
	Indigenous/ND females	89.23	89.22	98.17	- 0.01	+ 10.03
	Total Indigenous/ND	166.01	151.17	142.11	- 8.94	- 5.99
Buffalo	Total Female	85.7	92.5	100.57	+ 7.93	+ 8.72
	Total Male	19.5	16.103	9.283	- 17.42	- 42.35
Goat	Total Female	99.7	97.5	116.78	- 2.21	+ 19.77
	Total Male	40.7	37.61	32.105	- 7.57	- 14.65
Sheep	Total Female	53.67	49.89	60.9	- 7.04	+ 22.07
	Total Male	17.8	15.213	13.36	- 14.53	- 12.18
	Exotic/crossbred females	2.58	2.57	3.26	- 0.39	+ 26.85
	Total Exotic/Crossbred	3.72	3.781	4.088	+ 1.64	+ 8.12
	Indigenous/ND females	51.09	47.32	57.64	- 7.38	+ 21.81
	Total Indigenous/ND	67.8	61.288	70.172	- 9.64	+ 14.5
Mithun	Total Female	0.14	0.17	0.21	+ 23.36	+ 26.36
	Total Male	0.12	0.13	0.17	+ 1.57	+ 33.65
Yak	Total Female	0.045	0.041	0.031	- 7.65	- 24.08
	Total Male	0.038	0.035	0.026	- 7.62	- 25.88

Source: Livestock census, Directorate of economics and statistics and animal husbandry statistics division, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, M/O Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

Buffalo population

The buffalo population in India has exhibited a generally increasing trend since 1950 (Dey *et al.*, 2024) [6]. During the period from 2007-2012, the buffalo population increased from 105.34 million to 108.70 million, representing a growth of 3.19%. According to the 20th Livestock Census (2019), the total buffalo population further increased to 109.85 million, registering a growth of 1.1% compared to 2012 census. India continues to rank first globally in buffalo population, accounting for approximately 59.29% of the World's total buffalo population. A considerable increase was observed in the female buffalo population, which grew by 7.93% during 2007 to 2012 and by a further 8.72% during 2012-2019. In contrast, the male buffalo population declined sharply by 42.35% between the 2012 and 2019 censuses (Table 2). Despite these sex-wise differences, the overall buffalo population in India has maintained an increasing trend over the past decade, consistent with the pattern observed across the last five livestock censuses. Among the major buffalo-producing states, Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest increase of 25.88% in buffalo population, whereas Haryana experienced a decline of 28.22% compared with census of 2012. The sustained growth of buffalo husbandry in India may partly be attributed to consumer preferences for fat rich milk, as buffalo milk generally contains nearly twice the fat content of cow milk. Consequently, in response to market demand and the economic value of buffalo milk, farmers increasingly prefer buffaloes over cattle and some other livestock species. Notably, the buffalo population has continued to increase consistently despite the absence of a nationwide ban on buffalo slaughter, highlighting the important economic role of buffaloes in India's livestock sector.

Goat population

Goat constitute more than one-fourth (27%) of India's total livestock population, making them one of the most important livestock species in the country. The goat population declined from 140.54 million in 2007 to 135.17 million in 2012, representing a decrease of 3.82%. However, according to the

20th Livestock Census (2019), the goat population increased substantially to 148.88 million, registering a growth of 10.14% compared with the previous census (Table 2). The considerable rise in goat numbers during recent census period may be attributed to several factors, including the increasing consumer demand for chevon, growth in meat exports, growing awareness regarding the nutritional and potential medicinal value of goat milk, and the relative ease of managing goats compared with other livestock species. There was considerable variation in goat population across different states. Rajasthan recorded the highest population, with approximately 20.8 million goats. However, the highest rate of increase was observed in West Bengal, where the goat population increased by 41.49% compared with the previous census.

Milch animal population

The population of milch animals in India showed varying trends across cattle, buffaloes and goats during the successive livestock census periods. The total population of milch cattle increased from 62.45 million in 2007 to 67.54 million in 2012, registering a growth of 8.15%, and further increased to 74.59 million in 2019, showing a growth of 10.44% over 2012. This increase was mainly attributed to the rise in cattle in milk, which increased by 18.98% during 2012-2019, although the dry cattle population declined by 5.47% during the same period. The population of total milch buffaloes increased from 48.64 million in 2007 to 51.05 million in 2012, representing a growth of 4.95%, but remained unchanged at 51.07 million in 2019, with a marginal increase of only 0.04% over 2012. The population of buffaloes in milk increased by 4.35, whereas dry buffaloes declined by 10.15% during 2012-2019. In contrast, milch goats declined slightly from 62.48 million in 2019, registering a growth of 13.14%. Both In milk and dry goat populations increased during 2012-2019 by 15.39% and 9.92%, respectively (Table 3 and Fig. 3). Overall, the trend indicates a general increase in the population of productive milch animals during 2012-2019, particularly cattle and goats, while the buffalo population remained relatively stable.

Table 3: Species-wise population and growth rate of milch animals during 2007-2019

Species	Category	Population in 2007 (Million)	Population in 2012 (Million)	Population in 2019 (Million)	Growth rate during 2007 to 2012 (%)	Growth rate during 2012 to 2019 (%)
Cattle	In-Milk	41.40	43.95	52.29	+6.16	+ 18.98
	Dry	21.04	23.59	22.3	+ 12.12	- 5.47
	Milch	62.45	67.54	74.59	+ 8.15	+ 10.44
Buffalo	In-Milk	35.64	36.57	38.16	+ 2.61	+ 4.35
	Dry	12.99	14.48	13.01	+ 11.47	- 10.15
	Milch	48.64	51.05	51.07	+4.95	+ 0.04
Goat	In-Milk	37.04	36.25	41.83	- 2.13	+ 15.39
	Dry	25.44	25.31	27.82	- 0.51	+ 9.92
	Milch	62.48	61.56	69.65	- 1.47	+ 13.14

Source: Livestock census, Directorate of economics and statistics and animal husbandry statistics division, Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying, M/O Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying.

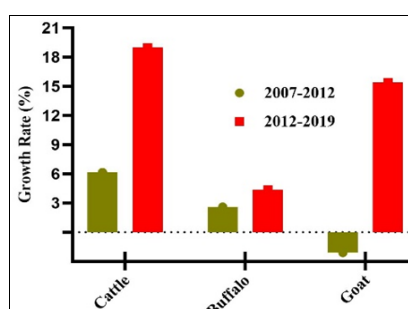


Fig 2: Species-wise growth of In-Milk animal population during 2007-2012 and 2012-2019

Sheep population

The sheep population in India showed a declining trend between 2007 and 2012, decreasing from 71.56 million to 65.07 million, while represented a reduction of approximately 9.07%. However, a substantial recovery was observed in 2019, when the total sheep population reached 74.26 million, registering an increase of 14.1% over the 2012 Census. India ranks third globally in terms of sheep population, contributing approximately 6.4% of the world's total sheep population. The population of exotic/crossbred sheep increased marginally by 1.64% during 2007-2012, followed by a more pronounced increase of 8.12% during 2012-2019. In contrast,

the indigenous/non-descript sheep population declined by 9.64% during 2007-2012, but subsequently increased by 14.50% during 2012-2019 (Table 2). The marked increase in the sheep population during last census period may be associated with the growing demand for mutton and its export potential, which has enhanced the economic importance of sheep production in the country. Considerable state wise variation was observed in sheep population trends. Telangana recorded the highest sheep population, at approximately 19.1 million, and also registered the highest growth of 48.51% compared with the previous census. In contrast, Uttar Pradesh experienced the largest decline, with a reduction of 27.25% in sheep population compared with the 2012 census.

Pig population

The pig population in India has exhibited a continuous declining trend over the past decade. Between 2007 and 2012, the pig population decreased from 11.13 million to 10.29 million, representing a decline of 7.54%. This downward trend continued during 2012-2019, with further reduction of 12.03%, resulting in a total pig population of approximately 9.06 million in 2019. Despite the declining population, India continues to face a substantial gap between pork production and domestic demand, with an estimated 50% deficit. The limited productivity of indigenous pig breeds, coupled with their relatively poor genetic potential has remained a major constraint to pig production. Pig farming is further affected by inbreeding, poor reproductive performance and disease outbreaks, particularly classical Swine fever, which may have contributed to the declining pig population.

Horses and ponies population

The population of horses and ponies increased marginally from 0.61 million in 2007 to 0.62 million in 2012, representing a growth of 2.12%. However, a substantial decline was observed during the subsequent census period, with the population falling to approximately 0.34 million in 2019. Thus, the population of horses and ponies decreased by nearly 45.2% between 2012 and 2019. Most of the major horse and pony rearing states recorded varying degree of decline according to the 20th Livestock Census, with Gujarat being an exception, registering an increase of approximately 19.42% compared with the previous census. The declining population of horses and ponies, along with the gradual dilution of Indigenous breeds, may associated with indiscriminate breeding practices and the limited availability of purebred stallions, particularly in the absence of organized breeding programmes.

Donkey population

The donkey population in India has declined sharply over the last decade. The population decreased from approximately 0.44 million in 2007 to 0.32 million in 2012, representing a decline of 27.12%. The downward trend became considerably more pronounced during 2012-2019, when the population fell further to approximately 0.12 million, corresponding to a decline of 61.2% compared with the previous census. The rapid reduction in donkey numbers may be associated with changing patterns of animal use and emerging market-related factors, including the reported demand for donkey hide in the Chinese market. The continued decline highlights the need for greater attention towards the conservation and sustainable utilization of this species.

Mule population

The mule population increased considerably from

approximately 0.14 million in 2007 to 0.20 million in 2012, representing a growth of 43.07% over the previous census. However, this increasing trend was reversed during the subsequent period, with the mule population declining sharply to approximately 0.08 million in 2019, a reduction of 57.1% compared with 2012. Among the states, Uttarakhand recorded the highest mule population, followed by Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

Camel population

The camel population in India has shown a persistent and concerning decline over the past decade. During 2007-2012, the population decreased by 22.63%, from approximately 0.52 million in 2007 to 0.40 million in 2012. The declining trend continued, with the population falling further to approximately 0.25 million in 2019, representing a reduction of 37.1% compared with 2012 census. The decline in camel numbers may be attributed to change in life style, increasing availability of alternative modes of transportation and inadequate economic incentives for tradition camel-rearing communities such as the Raikas. The major camel rearing states in India include Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Mithun population

The Mithun population in India increased from 0.26 million in 2007 to approximately 0.30 million in 2012, representing a growth of 12.98%. The population further increased to 0.39 million in 2019 census, registering a substantial growth of 29.52% compared with the 2012 census. During 2012-2019, the population of male and female Mithun increased by 33.65% and 26.36%, respectively (Table 2). Among the states, Arunachal Pradesh recorded the highest Mithun population as well as the growth rate (40.62%). Nagaland and Manipur ranked second and third, respectively, in term of population; however, both states experienced a declining trend during 2012-2019. In contrast, Mizoram recorded a positive growth of 20.38% in its Mithun population during same period.

Yak population

The Yak population in India showed a declining trend during the successive livestock census periods. The population decreased from 0.083 million in 2007 to approximately 0.076 million in 2012, representing a decline of 7.64%. It further declined to 0.058 million in 2019 census, registering a substantial reduction of 24.90% compared with the 2012 census. During 2012-2019, the population of male and female Yaks declined by 25.88% and 24.08%, respectively (Table 2). Among the major Yak rearing states, Jammu & Kashmir recorded the highest Yak population, followed by Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim. Arunachal Pradesh registered the highest growth rate 71.22%, whereas West Bengal recorded the steepest decline of 94.40% during 2012-2019. The overall decline in Yak population highlights the need for appropriate conservation, breeding and management interventions to safeguard this important high-altitude livestock resource.

Total Bovine population

The total bovine population in India showed a relatively stable trend across the successive livestock census periods. The population declined slightly from 304.76 million in 2007 to 299.98 million in 2012, representing a decrease of 1.57%. However, it subsequently increased to 303.76 million in 2019, registering a growth of 1.30% over the 2012 population.

Overall, the marginal recovery during 2012-2019 indicates as stabilization of the bovine population after the decline observed during 2007-2012. The trend was mainly influenced by changes in cattle and buffalo populations, particularly the increasing proportion of female and productive animals.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of livestock census data demonstrates that India's livestock sector has undergone considerable changes in population size and species composition over the past decade. The total livestock population declined from 529.69 million in 2007 to 512.05 million in 2012, but subsequently recovered to 536.76 million in 2019, showing a growth of 4.8% over 2012 census. This overall recovery was largely supported by the growth of sheep, goats, buffaloes and Mithun population, while indigenous cattle continued to decline, although at a slower rate than during 2007–2012. The total bovine population also showed relative stability, increasing marginally by 1.30% during 2012-2019. The growth in milch cattle and goats further indicates a gradual shift towards maintaining more productive animals within livestock production systems. The Mithun population increased by 29.52%, highlighting its growing importance in the northeastern region, whereas the yak population declined by 24.90%, emphasizing the need for greater attention to its conservation and sustainable management. In contrast, the continued decline in pig, Yak, horses and ponies, mules, camels and donkeys are a matter of concern. The declining pig population is particularly important in view of the existing gap between pork production and demand, emphasizes the need for genetic improvement of indigenous pigs, effective disease control, scientific management and better utilization of pork export potential. Similarly, the sharp decline in Yak and working equines warrant greater attention in livestock policies and development programmes, because of their importance to mountain and economically vulnerable rural communities. Despite India's large and diverse livestock resource base, low productivity per animal remains a major challenge due to low-yielding breeds, inadequate feed and fodder, poor management, disease constraints and rapid urbanization. Therefore, appropriate government policies, genetic improvement, scientific management, effective disease control, conservation of indigenous genetic resources and species-specific development programmes are essential for improving livestock productivity, strengthening rural livelihoods and ensuring the sustainable development of India's diverse livestock sector.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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