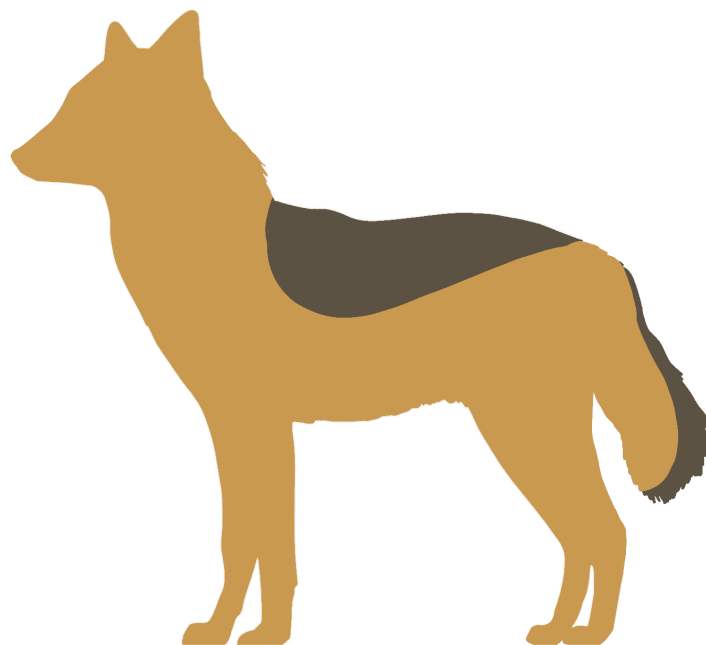


# TAKING THE JACKAL BY THE HORN



## A Report on the Poaching and Trade of Golden Jackals in India

The golden jackal *Canis aureus* is the most widespread wild canid in the Indian sub-continent. Jackals are generalists that inhabit a range of habitats, from dense forests to urban cities. Although jackals are mostly scavengers, they occasionally hunt small- to medium-sized prey. Given their large geographic range and purported stable populations, jackals are listed under the Least Concern category of the IUCN Red List. Despite the wide distribution, few studies in India have focused on the ecology and conservation of jackals.

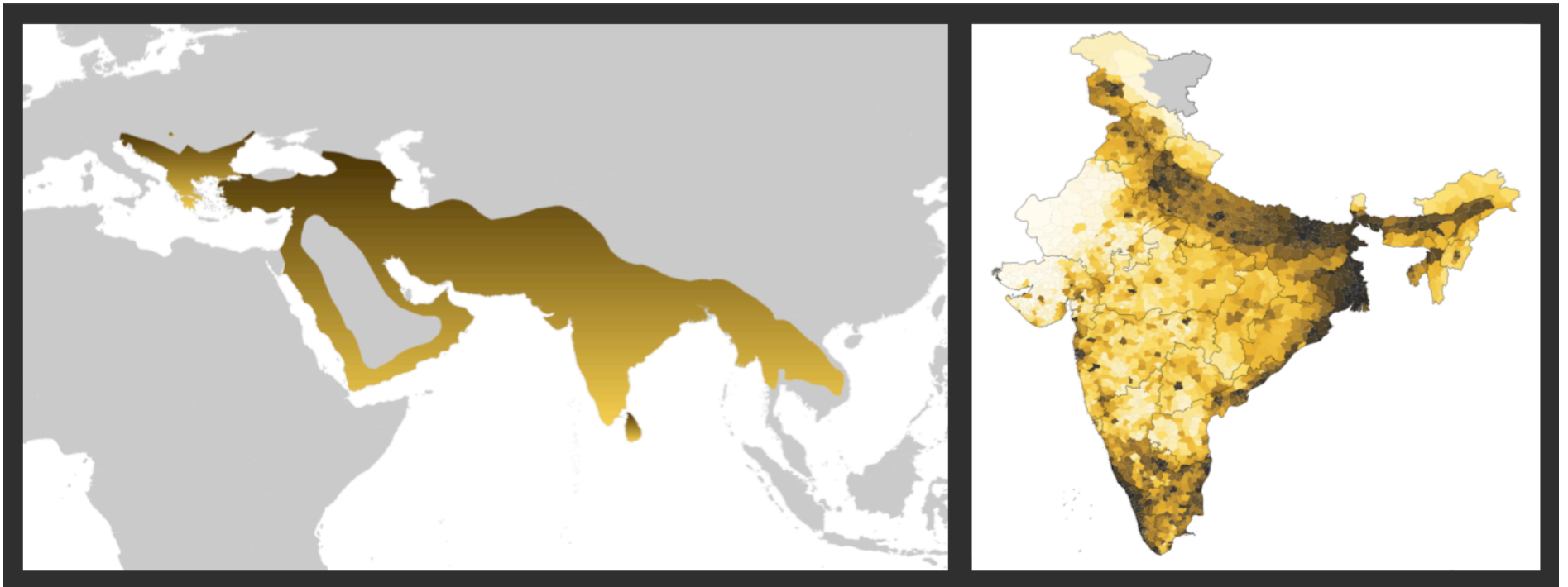


Image panel 1: Left: Global distribution of golden jackal (source: IUCN). Right: distribution of jackals in India (darker colors represent higher occupancy; source: Wild Canids–India Project)

## POACHING AND TRADE

- i. **Jackal meat** is consumed by several communities in the northeastern states of India<sup>1,2</sup>, and parts of western<sup>3,4</sup> and southern India<sup>5</sup>.
- ii. **Jackal body parts** such as skin and tails find use in traditional/cultural belief<sup>5,6</sup>. Poaching and trade of jackal skin, nails, teeth and tail have been documented in media reports from Punjab<sup>7</sup>, Kerala<sup>8</sup> and Tamil Nadu<sup>9</sup>.
- iii. ***Siyar singhi***: A more pervasive threat is likely from poaching for *siyar singhi*– a talisman extracted from the jackal and translates to ‘jackal horn’ in English. Given that a jackal’s skull does not have a true ‘horn’, the *siyar singhi* is either a protrusion or deformity behind the jackal’s sagittal crest (upper part of the skull), or in most cases, a tuft of hair from jackal, dog, pig, goat or other animal, stuck together in the shape of a ball. Some images on the Internet also show the dew claw of jackals/foxes/dogs passed off as *siyar singhi*. It appears to be commonplace in Indian trade markets, as evidenced by advertisements on social media and popular online retailers. Regional names for jackal ‘horn’ include *siyar singhi* and *gidar singhi* in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi and *nari kombu* in Tamil, Kannada and Telugu.

Seizures of *siyar singhi* by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau of India (WCCB) primarily occur during operations targeting the *hatha jodi* trade. *Hatha jodi* is the dried copulatory organs of the monitor lizard, a species greatly impacted by the black magic/traditional medicine industry in South Asia<sup>10</sup>. The demand for *siyar singhi* is driven by deep-rooted superstitious beliefs strengthened by online propaganda, perpetuated by traders of ritualistic worship materials, astrologers, and black magic practitioners of Hindu, Muslim and Sikh religious groups.

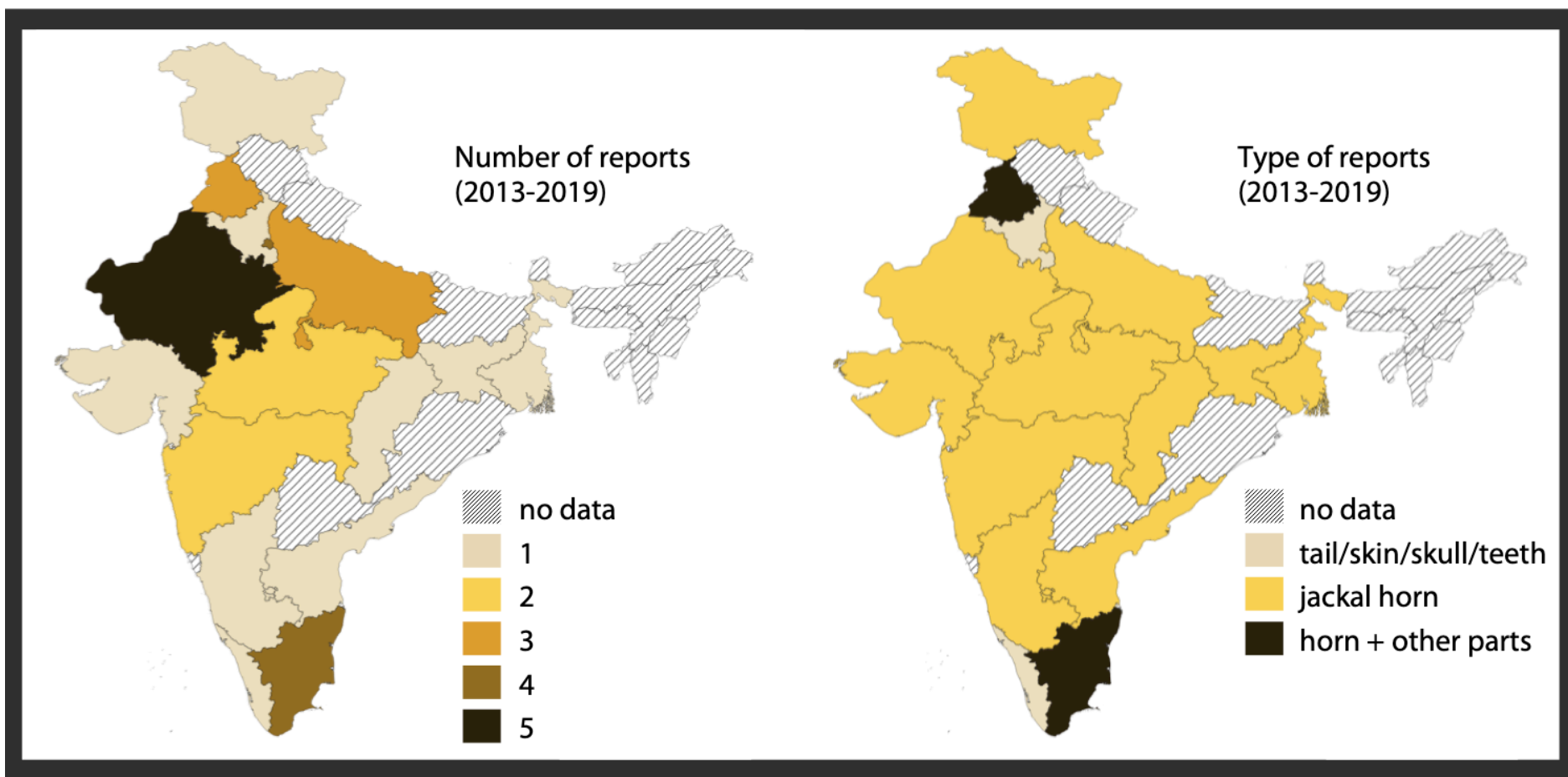


Image panel 2: State-wise frequency in number of media reports or advertisements (2013–2019) featuring sale, trade or seizure of jackal body parts

## JACKAL 'HORNS'

Verified accounts on YouTube endorse the purported magical powers of *siyar singhi*, devoid of any scientific basis<sup>a,b,c</sup>. The 'horn' is (falsely) believed to be a living entity, even after being extracted from a dead jackal<sup>d</sup>. Further in this narrative, the tuft of hair and bone continue to grow in size throughout the period of the owner's use and even multiply to form smaller tufts<sup>e</sup>. This tuft is claimed to be very rare, present in only one out of thousand jackals<sup>b,c</sup>. An alternate claim is that the jackal itself sheds off the tuft and bone, and this shed part may be opportunistically collected by people<sup>f</sup>.

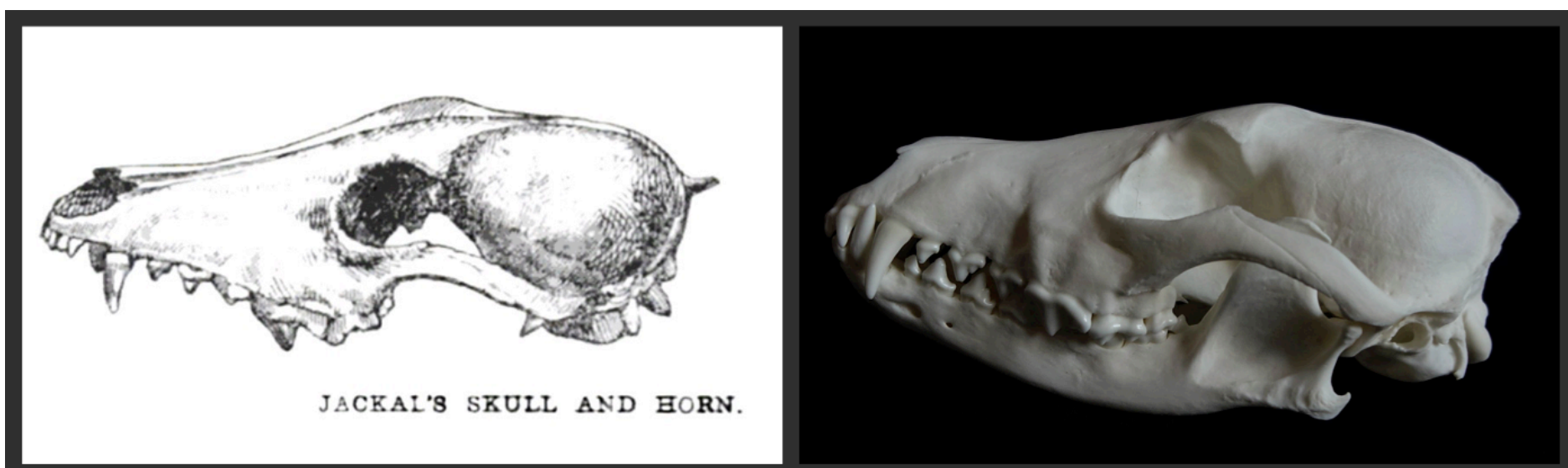


Image panel 3: Left: illustration of jackal skull with the illusionary 'horn' (source: Sketches of the natural history of Ceylon; James Emerson Tennent). Right: Image of jackal's skull (showing no 'horn'; source: Exifia, deviantart)





Image panel 4: Left: *Siyar singhi* allegedly extracted from the jackal. Right: A person attempts to show the illusory jackal 'horn' on a live jackal<sup>o</sup>

YouTube tutorials demonstrate how the product is stored/used– with cardamom (*elaichi*), cloves (*long*) and vermilion powder (*sindoor*)<sup>9</sup>. *Siyar singhi* is often sold in pairs– one male and one female<sup>b,9</sup>. Sellers are cognizant of fake *siyar singhis* that may be made from goat/dog hair<sup>h</sup>, and warn their potential customers of the same<sup>i,j</sup>. In one YouTube video, the seller is willing to demonstrate live removal of the part from the jackal, via video call<sup>k</sup>. In another video, the seller offers to provide a 'DNA test' of the product for authenticity<sup>l</sup>.

Plagued by negative public attitudes, the jackal in India is further disadvantaged by lack of scientific research, and by extension, research on poaching/illegal trade. This helps sustain a seemingly widespread online market with local, regional and international stakeholders. Demand from black magic practitioners of south Asian diaspora fuels the trade<sup>11</sup>. Retailers based in UK, US, Germany and Singapore also list *siyar singhi* for sale on their websites. Some media reports indicate that sellers procure *siyar singhis* from local hunters<sup>12</sup>, while others peg *siyar singhi* to be part of large international trade<sup>13</sup>. These raise serious concerns about the prevalence of organized crime networks, transporting and distributing jackal products across international borders.



Image panel 5:  
Top-left: *Siyar singhi* sold in a box with vermilion powder<sup>p</sup>

Bottom-left: *Siyar singhi* and *hatha jodi* in boxes with vermilion powder<sup>q</sup>

Right: A clump of jackal hair (for identification; source: Bahuguna et al., Wildlife Institute of India)



Poaching of jackals is problematic from the ecological as well as animal welfare perspectives. There is some evidence that jackals may be poached by planting crude bombs or trapped in leg-hold traps<sup>4,7,9</sup>. Hunting and/or trade of jackal is a punishable offence in India; it is protected under Part II of Schedule II of the Wild Life Protection Act 'WLPA' (1972). Jackal is also listed in Appendix III of CITES, and The Foreign Trade Policy issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (India) prohibits export and import of jackals, their parts and products. Our analysis of media reports revealed that between 2013 and 2019 alone, the WCCB has seized more than 400 jackal 'horns' and over 100 other jackal parts from various parts of the country (see Image panel 2). Our exploratory research establishes that the scale of harvest, demand and supply chain, and the stakeholders involved remain largely undocumented and severely underreported. This necessitates a broad-scale ground-based investigation of *siyar singhi* trade.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Recommendations for Forest Department

- i. Forest Department (FD) should confiscate jackal parts that may be encountered while targeting the larger black-magic market, which often includes multi-species trade comprising of jackal parts in combination with that of monitor lizards, musk pods (from musk deer), corals and other species<sup>m,n</sup>.
- ii. Jackal has the same level of protection as other high-value species (like elephant, tiger, leopard, etc.). The FD should invoke legal provisions within the WLPA to take action against offenders.
- iii. Animal parts seized during such raids should be sent for laboratory-based genetic analysis to help ascertain species identity.

### Recommendations for enforcement officials

- i. Protocols in the identification and screening of *siyar singhi* need to be developed for police, forest officials, customs authorities and other government agencies (SSB, BSF, etc.) that regulate wildlife trade.
- ii. Trade in parts of jackals and other wild animals, due to its trans-boundary nature, requires international collaboration. Customs officers deputed at international transit points need to be trained in identification of these products. Officers must take action under CITES and Customs Act, 1962.

### Recommendations for members of civil society

- i. Purchase, possession and/or sale of *siyar singhi* is a criminal offence in India. There is absolutely no scientific evidence to suggest that *siyar singhi* has any magical powers. It could be made from domestic animals (dog/goat/pig) or wild animals (jackal/hyena), which were trapped or killed mercilessly to prepare this product.
- ii. We urge the public to actively discourage online portals such as Amazon, Facebook and eBay by writing to them and demanding for strict screening of posts that involve trade of wild animal parts via their websites.
- iii. In case you encounter anyone selling *siyar singhi*, please contact the nearest forest office and inform the concerned authority about this activity.

### Recommendations for media personnel

- i. Do not mention the monetary value of *siyar singhi* (or other wildlife products) in media reports.
- ii. Mention the prescribed punishment for possession/trade of *siyar singhi* (or other wildlife products) in media reports, to deter wildlife crime.

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Media files referenced "a" to "q" are available upon reasonable request. Email: wildcanidsindia@gmail.com

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