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## Camel Breeding Management among the Somali, Sakuye, Gabbra and Rendille Pastoralists of Northern Kenya

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### Abstract

Camels are key livestock species in pastoral production systems in the arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya. Over 90% of Kenya camels are owned and managed by pastoralists. However, as a result of climatic variability, camels are adopted by traditional cattle keepers. For instance, Turkana camel keepers' claim that camel rustling has taken precedence over cattle rustling after their neighbours realized value of camel. Camels' main importances are food security and transport. Despite high demand for camels, the pastoral camel keepers expressed concern over declining performance of their camel herds. A survey was conducted in Turbi, Merille, Thambas and Dabel to gather information regarding breeds of camels kept, age bulls and heifers attain reproductive maturity, number and sources of breeding bulls, age of retiring breeding bulls, how to refrain closely related animals to mate. The study used semi-structured questionnaire to gather the information from 240 respondents across four study communities. Systematic random sampling was used to identify the respondents. Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 12. The result showed that the dominant breeds kept by Sakuye and Somali communities are Somali breed while Gabbra and Rendille kept mainly their own breed. Heifers attained reproductive maturity at age of  $3.94 \pm 0.43$  years in Gabbra herds,  $4.11 \pm 1.01$ , in Sakuye,  $4.46 \pm 1.70$  in Somali and  $4.70 \pm 0.45$  in Rendille. Bulls attain reproductive maturity at  $4.18 \pm 0.73$  years in Gabbra herds,  $5.68 \pm 1.79$  in Sakuye, and  $5.85 \pm 1.76$  in Somali and  $5.84 \pm 0.80$  in Rendille. Breeding bull in herds ranges from one to four and are sourced within own herds and neighbours. Bulls are refrained traditionally mating its mother but not sisters and daughters. The study concluded that the preferred breed of camel is Somali. To prevent inbreeding, the study recommends timely swooping of bulls and sourcing for bulls from far areas and retiring bulls at age of about 10 years to prevent them mating its daughters.

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