

Indigenous Poultry Breeds of Gujarat: A Comprehensive Profile

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Introduction

Gujarat's diverse landscapes, from the salty deserts of Kutch to the dense forests of the Dangs, have forged unique indigenous poultry breeds—specifically the Ankaleshwar, Aravali and Busra—that are as distinct as the state's famous cattle. These birds are not products of factory farming but of centuries of natural selection and co-evolution with tribal communities, thriving in harsh environments where commercial strains would fail. Their immense value lies in their "zero-input" resilience, as they survive entirely on scavenging without the need for expensive feed, and their role as a "living bank" that provides instant economic security for emergencies, all while being culturally revered for their distinct, gamey meat that is essential to local festivals and rituals.

1. Ankaleshwar: The Pride of South Gujarat

This breed is the most well-researched and popular indigenous fowl in the region. It is named after the Ankleshwar taluka in the Bharuch district.



Geographic Home

- **Primary Districts:** Bharuch and Narmada.

- **Environment:** Fertile plains, black soil (cotton growing areas) and semi-arid scrublands.

Physical Appearance

The Ankaleshwar is a beautiful, medium-sized bird designed for camouflage.

- **Feathers:** Mostly yellow with black strips, or sometimes white with black strips.
- **Skin & Legs:** Distinctively Yellow. This yellow color is highly valued in local markets.
- **Unique Variations:** Some birds carry special genes for survival:
 - Naked Neck:** Less feathers on the neck to help cool down in 40°C+ heat.
 - Dwarfism:** Smaller bodies that require **less food to survive**.
 - Frizzle:** Curled feathers that help release body heat.

Management & Diet

Housing: They roam freely during the day and return to the owner's house or a small coop at night to sleep.

Diet: They are experts at finding termites and insects in cotton fields. Farmers supplement them with locally grown grains like Sorghum (Jowar), Pearl Millet (Bajra) and broken rice.

Performance (Production)

- **Eggs:** They lay about 80 eggs per year in the village (up to 140 if well-fed).
- **Weight:** Males weigh around 1.8 kg; Females around 1.58 kg.

Mothering Ability: The hens are excellent mothers. They have high fertility (91%) and hatch their eggs very well (84%), meaning farmers rarely need to buy new chicks.

2. Aravali: The Warrior of the Hills

Named after the ancient Aravalli mountain range, this bird is known locally as "Pahadi" (of the hills). It is built for rugged terrain and is genetically distinct from other Indian breeds.



[Aravali Male]



[Aravali Female]

Geographic Home

- **Primary Districts:** Mahisagar, Aravalli, Sabarkantha and Banaskantha (North-Eastern Gujarat).
 - **Environment:** Rocky hills, dry forests and uneven terrain.
- Physical Appearance:** The Aravali is the largest and heaviest of the three breeds.
- **Feathers:** Brown and stripped, providing camouflage against dry leaves and rocks.
 - **Comb:** Single comb.
 - **Key Identification Mark:** Adult birds have a visible Red Strip on their shanks (legs). This is the easiest way to identify a purebred Aravali.

Temperament & Survival

- **Alertness:** These birds are extremely alert. Because they live in hills full of predators (hawks, wild cats), they have a "flight or fight" response and can run very fast.

- **Housing:** Because of high predation risks, they are kept in strong night shelters made of stone, mud, or bamboo.

Performance (Production)

- **Meat Focus:** This bird is prized for meat rather than eggs.
- **Weight:** Males are heavy, averaging 2.09 kg (the heaviest of the three breeds).
- **Eggs:** They lay about 72 eggs per year. However, villagers rarely sell the eggs; they hatch them to produce more meat birds.
- **Genetics:** Studies show the Aravali has very high genetic diversity, making it a healthy and robust population.

3. Busra: The Agile Forest Dweller

The Busra is a small, trans-boundary breed found in the tribal belts along the Gujarat-Maharashtra border. It is a true forest bird.



[Busra Male]



[Busra Female]

Geographic Home

- **Primary Districts:** The Dangs and Surat (Gujarat); Nandurbar and Dhule (Maharashtra).
- **Environment:** Humid, deciduous forests with heavy rainfall.

Physical Appearance

The Busra is a **lightweight** bird, evolved to fly into trees.

- **Feathers:** Often white mixed with black or brown. A common look is a black body with reddish-brown wings.
- **Ears & Eyes:** Distinct White earlobes and a Red ring around the eyes.
- **Skin:** Pinkish (unlike the yellow skin of the Ankaleshwar).

Unique Behavior: Tree Roosting

- **No Housing:** In many tribal villages, adult Busra birds do not have coops. They roost (sleep) high up in trees or on walls at night to escape predators.
- **Flock:** Flocks are small (8-9 birds) and usually have many young chicks because adult mortality is high in the forest.

Performance & Health

- **Weight:** Very small. Males are 1.11 kg; Females are under 1 kg.
- **Eggs:** Poor layers, producing only 40-55 eggs per year.
- **Vulnerability:**

Unlike the hardy Aravali, the Busra is sensitive to parasites and diseases. The humid forest environment and lack of housing make them prone to illness and they require conservation help.

5. Comparative Analysis: At a Glance

The table below highlights how the environment has shaped the physical traits of each breed.

Feature	Ankaleshwar	Aravali	Busra
Region	South Gujarat Plains	North-East Hills	Border Forests
Primary Use	Dual (Meat & Egg)	Meat (Heavy)	Meat (Light)
Body Size	Medium (1.8 kg male)	Large (2.09 kg male)	Small (1.11 kg male)
Skin Color	Yellow	White	Pinkish
Unique ID	Naked Neck / Yellow Skin	Red Strip on Leg	White Earlobe
Housing	Simple Coops / Home	Strong Stone/Mud Shelters	Tree Roosting
Behavior	Good Scavenger	Highly Alert / Fast	Flighty / Agile
Health	Very Robust	Very Robust	Susceptible to parasites
Feature	Ankaleshwar	Aravali	Busra

Summary of Differences

1. **Size Gradient:** The rocky hills require muscle power, so the **Aravali** is big. The forests require flying into trees, so the **Busra** is small and light.
2. **Productivity:** The **Ankaleshwar** is the most balanced producer (eggs and meat), making it the "backbone" of backyard poultry.
3. **Resilience:** The Aravali and Ankaleshwar are tough survivors. The Busra is more fragile and needs veterinary support to survive in the wild.

6. Conclusion

The Ankaleshwar, Aravali and Busra are not just chickens; they are vital components of Gujarat's rural ecosystem.

- **Ankaleshwar** proves that native breeds can be productive.
- **Aravali** preserves a massive genetic reservoir of hardiness.
- **Busra** represents a unique cultural adaptation to forest life.

Preserving these breeds is essential. As climate change increases temperatures and feed costs rise, the low-input, high-heat tolerance of these "Desi" birds offers a sustainable solution for future food security.