IUCN/SSC

ANTELOPE SPECIALIST GROUP

GNUSLETTER

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AFRICA

Sub-Sahara

A proposal to reintroduce 8-10 Gazella dama to Senegal's P. N. de la Langue de Barbarie has been submitted to IUCN by the Senegal Parcs Nationaux. A copy was sent to the ASG Chairman for comment. On the grounds that a) John Newby is the ranking ASG authority on dama gazelle and the sub-Saharan region, b) that I have no knowledge of Senegal, and c) too little information was provided to make intelligent judgement, I made only a few general comments. First of all, one would hope the animals will be zoo-bred rather than wild-caught; and that the enclosure where they will spend the first six months will be of adequate size, and so situated that the gazelles can be released simply by removing the fencing so that they can gradually disperse from a familiar spot.

East Africa

In one of the recommendations made by the ASG at the 1980 SSC meeting at Kilaguni, concern was expressed over the need for better protection of the threatened suni (Nesotragus moschatus moschatus) and red duiker (Cephalophus natalensis adersi) of Zanzibar. Alan Rodgers of Dar es Salaam University, who participated in the Kilaguni meeting, writes that,

> "A member of the Tanzania Wildlife Division is currently studying the rare endemic duikers (blue and red) and suni on Zanzibar Island for a wildlife M.Sc. from the University of Dar es Salaam. The study hopes to map density distribution patterns in regard to vegetation type and land use practice. From this initial survey it is intended to select one or more areas of high wildlife value and low agricultural usage as long term conservation estate. This area would become the study site for a more intensive investigation of small bovid biology.

Initial evidence shows all three animals still exist (which was not known for sure) and that they have a wide distribution. They are still hunted however and skins can be bought in the market place! Any persons with access to literature on small bovids or who have experience of such animals are kindly requested to pass on any information they have to Issa Swai c/o Zoology Department, P. O. Box 35064, Dar es Salaam."

Rodgers reports, further, that a greater offtake of Serengeti wildebeest that invade agricultural lands outside the Park is being planned on a more regular basis. This is partly in order to compensate enighboring tribes who suffer loss of crops and pasture from the impact of the huge Serengeti wildebeest population, estimated at 1.5 million ± 10% when last sampled in June, 1980. It will be less easy to compensate the Masai, who contend that the fivefold increase in wildebeest numbers since the early 1960's has deprived them of much of their wet-season grazing during the months following the wildebeest February calving season, when cattle can contact malignant catarrh from afterbirths and calves.

Zambia

Aerial Survey of Kafue Lechwe

The first thorough aer l census since 1975 of the lechwe (Kobus leche kafuensis) of the Kafue Flats was flown by R. C. V. Jeffery , Executive Officer of the Wildlife Conservation Society of Zambia, from 27-30 October, 1981. The Society paid for the census. A preliminary distribution survey, flown in July, was funded by the University of Zambia's Kafue Basin Research Project. (The results were published in Black Lechwe No.1, N.S 81:17-20.)

The census total of about 34,000 lechwe represents a reduction of over one-half the population since 1975's estimate of 80,000 lechwe. The reasons for the drastic decline remain to be determined. Jeffery, G. B. Kaweche of Zambia N. P. and Wildlife Service, and G. W. Howard of the Kafue Basin Research Project propose to repeat the aerial surveys in May and November, 1982 and November, 1983, to be followed in each case by a census (via stratified, random strip sampling). The data will be analysed on the University's computer.

WWF is being asked to fund the project, which happens to be one of those recommended to WWF by the Antelope Specialists after Kilaguni. The indication of a steep decline in the Kafue lechwe population makes this a high-priority proposal and the price is bargain-basement, thanks to the availability of experts and aircraft in Zambia.

Angola

Next July I hope to spend a month in Angola surveying the status of the giant sable (Hippotragus niger variani), by counting and classifying herds in Cangandala National Park and the Luando Reserve,

where my wife and I spent a year studying this race in 1969/70. The Director of the National Directorate of Nature Conservation has welcomed the proposal for an IUCN/SSC representative to make the survey, and the New York Zoological Society will support the project. I am now waiting for official approval and a visa.

ASIA

Dr. G. M. Oza, Chairman of the Asian Antelope Subgroup, is coordinating the survey of Asian antelopes, concentrating on India. Hopefully funds can be found for site visits to at least some of the major reserves and parks where Indian antelopes occur. The cooperation of other Indian naturalists and conservationsits is being sought for the survey.

Dr. Indra K. Sharma has spent 16 years making ecological studies of the Indian Thar Desert. He has sent in a ms reporting observations of Indian gazelle (Gazella gazella), blackbuck (Antilope cervicapra) and nilgai (Boselaphus tragocamelus) in his study area 25 km from Jodhpur. Large numbers of stray dogs are a serious menace to gazelle and blackbuck fawns, contributing to an estimated 85% mortality rate. Nilgai calves are less vulnerable; around 50% of them survive.

In some areas, Sharma reports, an acute shortage of green food and vitamin A (due to overgrazing and cultivation) caused Xerosis cornea blindness among at least 27 blackbuck, most of which fell prey to predators or accidents.

SOUTH AMERICA

Dr. John E. Jackson of the Secretaria de Estado de Agricultura y Ganaderia, San Luis, Argentina, has volunteered to survey the status of the blackbuck in Argentina. He has prepared, duplicated and circulated a letter to the majority of the provincial wildlife authorities, and other organizations, asking them for information on the number and status of this introduced species.

ABOUT THE GROUP MEMBERS

Jeremy David, who did his doctorate on the bontebok (Damaliscus dorcas dorcas), has resigned from the ASG to devote full time to seal research for the South African Sea Fisheries Institute.

Below are the names and addresses of current ASG members. Several more specialists will soon be invited to join. More news items will be included in future Gnusletters as received from consultants and correspondents.

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