Antelope Specialist Group

I.U.C.N.

S.S.C.

GNUSLETTER

September, 1984

Edited by R. D. Estes, Chairman 5 Granite St., Peterborough NH 03458, USA

ASG Meetings at the SSC Meetings in Madrid

The Antelope Specialist Group is overdue for a meeting. The last one was in February, 1981 at New Delhi. Jeremy Anderson chaired that meeting. Who will volunteer to chair a session at the SSC meetings on 3-4 November in Madrid, before the IUCN General Assembly? Unfortunately I shall be unable to attend, but presumably some antelope specialists will be on hand. If those intending to go will let me know right away, I'll alert Bob Scott that an ASG meeting will be held; to save time, you might contact him direct and/or send him a copy of your letter to me.

Summary of Antelope Specialist Group Activities, 1981-84 - Chairman's Report to the SSC

The antelope survey undertaken by the Antelope Specialist Group as its first major project is nearing completion. Reports have now been received about the conservation status and trend of most of the readily seen species in over 80% of the countries of Africa and Asia where antelopes occur. Check sheets sent out by Jane Thornback in preparation for revision of the Red Data Book on African mammals have also been sent in for the antelopes of most countries.

Predictably enough, little firm information is available regarding the status of cryptic species such as duikers, neotragine antelopes, and sitatunga that live in rainforest and other closed habitats. Information from some of the more inaccessible countries such as Tibet, Mongolia, Iran, Chad and Angola is also very limited.

While efforts to fill in gaps and update existing reports are ongoing, the main task now is to edit the reports already in hand and produce a publishable manuscript. Ideally the survey results would be arranged systematically, with separate accounts of each species and its subspecies, grouped according to tribe. However, to extract and rearrange the information contained in the geographical

reports would involve a great deal more effort and, inevitably, there would be gaps in the coverage of some populations of nearly every species. Seemingly the only workable solution is to publish the antelope survey as a collection of reports on the status of antelopes in the different countries of Africa and Asia, as was done in the last general survey of African antelopes published in Mammalia in 1958.

Based on the results of the survey, the next task of the ASG will be to identify species, subspecies, and populations that are endangered or threatened, to establish priorities based on importance, need, and the ability of a given population to benefit from conservation efforts, then to develop action plans and recommend specific projects for funding. WWF and IUCN already have major, ongoing programs intended to save viable populations of several of the most endangered desert antelopes, notably the addax, scimitar oryx, Arabian oryx, and dama gazelle. The Saharan region, together with the bordering Sahel, Sudanese, and Somali arid zones are the regions of Africa where more different antelopes are endangered than anywhere else, and where effective conservation measures are urgently needed if several other now-rare gazelles, dibatag, beira, and western populations of topi/tiang are to survive into the next century. The process of elimination has gone even further on the Arabian Peninsula.

The ASG currently has 29 members, who reside in 22 different countries of Africa, Asia, and Europe, and in the United States.

ARABIAN PENINSULA

Arabian Oryx - Richard Fitter has kindly written the following report about the Arabian oryx reintroduction program.

"Two notable events have occurred in the Arabian oryx world in the past year. In October the Royal Jordanian Conservation Society released 31 oryx into the 22-sq-km fenced enclosure of the Shaumari Reserve near Azraq, and in April the Oman Government released a second herd of 10-11 into the Jiddat al Harassis in Oman. The Oman Government was also concerned with the Jordanian release, having grant-aided the Shaumari fence-line. The World Wildlife Fund has also for many years been concerned with both these projects, which represent a successful conclusion of Operation Oryx, launched in 1962 by the Fauna Preservation Society, also with WWF aid."

"It is unlikely that oryx can be released into the open desert in Jordan in the near future, partly because they would inevitably move across the Saudi frontier, which being quite remote from Riyadh is much less well policed. This makes the Oman releases the real key to the return of the Arabian oryx in the wild. More than two years after the release of 10 animals into the Jiddat al Harassis in January 1982, they have increased to 13, eight births being offset by three calf deaths and two adults returning to the base camp. The white oryx can therefore now be claimed as the first successful reintroduction to the wild of an animal that has actually become extinct in the wild. No wild Arabian oryx have been reliably seen in any part of the Arabian desert since 1972. Although living completely independent of man, the first herd is still being guarded continuously by truck-borne members of the Harassis tribe (one of the sad things about modern Arabia is that the camel is no longer used for transport). This is necessary because of the very real continuing danger of poaching in a part of the world where greater prestige still attaches to those who have killed an oryx."

AFRICA

Gazella dama - The discussion in the last Gnusletter about the different races of dama gazelle, and the distribution map reprinted from Andreae and Krumbiegel's 1976 paper, drew comments from a number of readers. Gil Child of the FAO Forestry Resources Division, had this to say (in lit. 27 June 1984):

"My main purpose in writing, however, is related to gazelle. I am anxious to obtain all possible information on gazelle biology, ecology and management, especially in respect of species occurring in Mauretania and Saudi Arabia. Could you (or other appropriate members of the group) assist with references and people to contact?

"It is interesting to note that localities 8, 9, 10 and 11, for various subspecies of G. dama given on the map on page 6 of the news letter, are all situated in Mauretania (in spite of the geographic descriptions!). Dr. Yves Prevost, our wildlife specialist in that country, is pessimistic about their current status."

Jeffrey Sayer, ASG member and WWF Senior Conservation Officer, wrote (25 June, 1984):

"I would just like to query one point on Senegal from Roland Wirth. I am very surprised to see references to Gazella dama from Northern Togo and Dahomey (Benin). I know this area extremely well and although I believe it possible that G. rufifrons may have occurred there in the past I feel that it is extremely unlikely that G. dama has ever done so. I would be extremely grateful if you could communicate my query to Dr. Wirth."

David M. Jones, Director of Zoos of the Zoological Society of London and a member of the Captive Breeding Specialist Group, has written (21 August, 1984), "Finally, with regard to the dama gazelle, I do not believe that there are any permista in captivity. All the Mhorr gazelles originated from the Armenian herd and the others originated from a large group caught in western Chad in about 1966. The dama has been very successful in captivity and there must be at least 500, particularly in the North American continent."

Dr. J. R. Vericad, who took over direction of the Almeria Experimental Arid Zone Station at the end of 1983, wrote Pierre Portas, IUCN/WWF Project Manager for Africa, in July expressing appreciation of the "very valuable information" about dama gazelle. "I see the translocation of dama gazelles to Senegal has produced some criticism," he said, "due probably to Cano's paper and that there are two opposed opinions about the lumping of different subspecies." He went on to say that he has been reviewing all management activities concerned with their breeding stock. "Undoubtedly we should very much appreciate advice from people concerned with antelope research and with species conservation and reintroduction problems." He would like to find a way to cooperate with such people. The forthcoming meetings in Madrid would be a good time to meet with Dr. Vericad, who will be there.

Ethiopia

Chris Hillman has sent the following interim report on his mountain nyala study (in lit. 4 Aug 1984):

Work in Bale Mountains is progressing well and we have now nine months data on the computer. We can now make some tentative conclusions about Mountain Nyala

in part of their range in Ethiopia, but these are no more than preliminary. The Proposed Bale Mountains National Park covers an area of 2,200 km^2, at altitudes varying from 1,500m in the south, to the high plateau in the main mountain massif at over 4,000m with several peaks, the highest of which is at 4,400m the second highest point in Ethiopia. The Park HQ is at Dinsho in the extreme north of the Park at an altitude of 3,200m. It is near here that the best concentration of Mountain Nyala occur, and where most conservation management has occurred over the last twelve years since the Park's inception. In a small area, largely consisting of the Gaysay and Web River valleys, with their associated grasslands and Artemesia bush, with fringing Hagenia and Juniperus woodlands, we have counted as many as 555 Nyala in an afternoon. The area observed is just over 17 km^2. This number has varied over the eight months we have been doing this ground census, from a low of 153 at the end of the dry season - this year a drought in which several Nyala were found dead and in very poor condition. It is evident that Mountain Nyala leave the Gaysay area in the dry season, but particularly the adult males as evidenced in the changing ratio of adult males to females and juveniles. We are not yet sure to which area they go but suspect it is to the forested Lajo ridge to the north - an area not included in the Proposed Park area.

While such a heavy concentration of Mountain Nyala may seem to bode well for the species, no other part of the Proposed Park area carries such high numbers, nor are such high numbers reported from any of the other few remaining bits of Nyala habitat. Elsewhere in the Bale Mountains, where most work has to be done on foot and on horseback, we are lucky to see one small group of Nyala in three or four days of walking. These high altitude Nyala flee at any sight of man - whether on foot, horseback or in a vehicle on the one road crossing the high plateau. This suggests two conclusions - first that in the higher areas the animals are still at risk from man somehow hence the fear they show, and second that the habitat at the lower altitude is more suited to Nyala. Certainly the population at this lower level has increased from a few sightings a month as reported twelve years ago to the present very high level as a result of protection and the exclusion of grazing domestic livestock. Protection at the higher altitudes does not seem to have had the same effect. This protection is only nominal at higher altitudes; however, few people now carry arms, and no evidence has been found of Nyala persecution, despite the fear the animals show. While the high altitude area is very important for another endemic and endangered mammal species - the Semien Fox, it is evident that Nyala conservation will be better served through increasing the habitat available at the lower altitudes.

Reports from other parts of Ethiopia suggest that Mountain Nyala only now occur in very small numbers. However few people have been to these areas, and much confusion has been experienced in reports between Mountain Nyala and Greater Kudu - a species Nyala closely resemble, and both have the same name in Amharic and Orominya languages, with merely a prefix to indicate the altitude at which each species is found. We have been able to visit one area where Mountain Nyala still occur - near the Forest Resources Institute at Wondo Guenet on the edge of the Rift Valley. At 1,900m ASL this is the lowest the species has been reported from ever, but the population is very small and extremely restricted. Hopefully it will be possible to do at least an aerial survey of other populations in the next dry season, and then possibly visit more promising areas on the ground after that.

Data accrued so far show that Mountain Nyala exist in basic family units consisting of one adult female plus her one or two latest calves. These are then loosely associated in aggregations of up to nearly a hundred animals, depending on the habitat, season and time of day. Composition of the aggregations changes by the hour, but

family units change very little, the calves being associated with their mothers to about two years of age. The home ranges are also extremely consistent and small, within a season. Adult females and their progeny occupy only few square kilometres, but adult males occupy larger areas. Males are not territorial, but associate subject to a dominance hierarchy, reinforced by displays, horn tussling and some fighting. Up to thirteen adult and subadult males have been seen together in a group, either with or without the presence of adult females. The rate of association of adult males with females varies and suggests there is a mating rut late in the wet season, but does not exclude year-round mating, since new-born calves have been seen in most months so far.

A wide range of food plants have been recorded, that include considerable amounts of grass, as well as herbs, bush and lower tree branch vegetation. It is evident that the conservation effort will have to be expanded for this species - both in the Bale Mountains area, and in other parts of the animal's range. This will take time to develop, and must be linked with environmental conservation, not only for the sake of the Nyala, but also for the sake of the Ethiopian people. It is a much-used land with a high density population, that requires a great degree in inter-departmental conservation activity.

Other antelope species found in the Bale Mountains include the Grey, Bush or Grimm's Duiker, Menelik's Bushbuck, Bohor Reedbuck and Klipspringer. All except the last species are found at the lower altitudes around 3,000m. Klipspringer are restricted to suitable rocky habitat only found at higher altitudes, and Mountain Nyala have been found at all altitudes including the very top of Tullu Deemtu - the highest point. The other antelope species occur in reasonable numbers, but give less cause for concern since they are found in other parts of Africa where they are well protected. Menelik's Bushbuck - a subspecies, is found in a few other parts of Ethiopia, but generally in restricted areas and at very low densities. It is the most different of the subspecies that I have seen, but is certainly merely the extreme end of a gradient in variation. Changes can be seen with altitude in as short a distance as 100km in travelling through the Park from north to south and into the lower elevations of the Harenna Forest in the southern area. A surprising absence in this southern forest area, is that of any true forest duikers in the genus Cephalophus. This gap is parallelled by absences in the primate range of species, and large herbivores - no buffalo or elephant or rhino.

More, recent censuses have been done of the Senkelle Swayne's Hartebeest and suggest that a further increase has occurred to a population size of ca. 1700 now. An application for funds for fencing necessary along one boundary is in preparation. Valuable advice was received from another ASG member, Dr. Stanley Price from Oman, when he visited both Senkelle and Bale in January this year.

Kenya

As a postscript to his piece on rinderpest in the last Gnusletter, Michael Woodford writes that the main countries affected by this epizootic at the moment are Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic.

Mozambique

ASG member José Labão Tello, formerly Chief Game Warden, has come through with a province-by-province report on the status of artiodactyls in Mozambique, including the following species: buffalo, eland, kudu, nyala, sitatunga, wildebeest, hartebeest, common reedbuck, mountain reedbuck, waterbuck, sable, roan ("very endangered"),

impala, giraffe, and warthog.

South Africa and Botswana

Jeremy Anderson has been promoted from Director of the Pilansberg Game Reserve to Deputy Director of Bophuthatswana's new National Parks and Wildlife Management Board (Private Bag 2078, Mafikeng 8670), in charge of Research.

Jeremy writes that Doug Williamson (Kalahari Ungulate Movement Study) is counting only about 10% of the wildebeest he counted at the same time last year. The veterinary fences and the drought together claimed probably 50,000 animals last year alone.
What fools we mortals be.

India

Indra Kumar Sharma has begun a promising study of the four-horned antelope, Tetracerus quadricornis, in the Aravallies mountain range of Rajasthan. A condensation of his first report (in lit. 11 July 1984) is presented here:

Distribution - from south of the Himalayas to South India in deciduous woodlands; absent from moist evergreen and montane forests.

Preferred Habitat - valleys in dry deciduous forest with stream or waterhole and steep slopes or small mountains; also found in the valleys of low hills, particularly plateaux with high grass and shrubs. Tetracerus has to drink more than twice a day, therefore rarely occurs further than 1.5 km from water.

Diet - largely fruits (Ficus glomerata, F. lecor, Zizyphus jujuba, Z. oenophela, Grewia tenex, Eugenia jamolana, Capparis sepiaria, Madhuca indica, and Cordia myxa); browse (sprouts of Dendrocalamus, Zizyphus, Grewia, Commiphora); shrubs and grasses (Cenchrus, Heteropogon, and Cyperus).

Social Organization - solitary, but also in small groups of 2-5, and sometimes more when different families are attracted to the same point food source. It maintains dung middens near regularly used resting places.

Breeding - September to December, especially the first two months; one, rarely two young.

Predators - Jackal and jungle cat are major predators of fawns. Leopard, wolf and jackal prey on adults, which escape by bounding up steep slopes or bolting into dense cover and hiding.

Conservation Status - fairly safe from poachers because of its retiring habits and closed habitat. Creating sanctuaries to protect its habitat should be sufficient to safeguard its survival.

Dr. Sharma intends to continue the study beginning in October, focusing on ecological and biological questions, and human impact on this antelope.

******