Antelope Specialist Group

I.U.C.N.

S.S.C.

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PUBLICATION OF THE ANTELOPE SURVEY

Rod East (Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Ruakura Soil and Plant Research Station, Private Bag, Hamilton, New Zealand), whose offer to collate, analyse and edit antelope survey material was reported in the May, 1983 Gnusletter, has again volunteered his services. He is actually willing to edit the reports and whip the antelope survey into publishable form. So the prospects of getting this information published sometime soon suddenly look bright. The best way to show appreciation for this extraordinarily generous effort is to cooperate fully and promptly with Rod in supplying any additional information he may request from ASG members.

REINTRODUCTIONS - to worry or not to worry about subspecies.

The discussion in recent Gnusletters of dama gazelle subspecies and proposed reintroductions in Senegal of captive animals belonging to a different region and subspecies, struck Chris Hillman as inconsequential. He writes (23 Sept. 1984):

"... I do really wonder what the effect of such emphasis on subspecies may be on their - or the species' - conservation... All of this is more confusing than helpful, I feel, to the local people in the field, on whom we have to ultimately depend to carry out conservation, and whose good will is required. I feel strongly that where a whole species is endangered, as Wirth feels [the dama gazelle] is, don't worry about subspecies at the moment, unless you have means in your zoos to conserve good breeding populations of each - which in this case seems unlikely.

"In Africa, the more widespread a species, the more it is apparently subspeciated - viz. this gazelle, bushbuck, buffalo, etc. I certainly think that if representatives of dama gazelle can be reintroduced to an area where the species once existed, then go ahead and do it. It's a real purist ideal to hold back because they haven't got a black spot on the nose or something!

"By all means, do all within your resources to conserve genetic variety - but the resources of these countries are very limited. Gentry's comments in Meester and Setzer (Smithsonian Identification Manual) regarding this species are worth noting. He shows a cline in body color from west to east, of decreasing red or brown

color [and increasing extent of white]. He says this cline could be more complex, but that Rode thinks habitat, season and perhaps ontogeny also affect coloration.

"There is far too much emphasis on mere coloration in defining subspecies, especially from museum skins as carried out by the experts. Behavior, habitat and adaptation to it need careful study - however, we are back to the question of funds and time - and with such a widespread and low-density species we do not have these."

In this particular case I think the above points are well-taken. If a well-protected area with suitable habitat exists within the species' previous distribution where it may become reestablished as a wild animal through introducing captive-bred stock, then clearly it would be absurd to thwart the attempt on the grounds that it was the wrong subspecies. However, in many other cases the question of subspecies is highly relevant. For instance, I would strongly object to the introduction of one subspecies of wildebeest or hartebeest within the range of another. The same goes for the different races of Grant's gazelle, especially the forms on opposite sides of the Rift Valley.

In my opinion, every effort should be made to preserve subspecies as long as there is any choice. What this means, in practice, is that a search for breeding stock of the right subspecies should be undertaken whenever reintroductions are contemplated. The feeling that antelope specialists can benefit by exchanging information with the Captive Breeding Specialist Group led me to invite David M. Jones of the London Zoological Society (whose comments on the dama gazelle were quoted in the last Gnusletter) to become an ASG member.

If any other members or readers wish to express their views on this subject, the floor is open.

NEAR EAST

Gazelle Studies Unit

Some timely help with the above problem, particularly as it relates to the continuing confusion over gazelle taxonomy, may be in the offing. Dr. Chris W. Furley, veterinarian of the Al Ain Zoo and Aquarium in Abu Dhabi (P. O. Box 1204, Al Ain) is proposing to establish a Gazelle Studies Unit to accomplish the following goals:

1. study the anatomy of skulls of gazelles from different regions to establish as far as possible the species and subspecies present today;
2. study the chromosome/karyotype of each species and subspecies to determine whether we have enough material to divide species into subspecies and to determine which species are closely related;
3. encourage zoos and parks to report their breeding and management successes, and to discuss their problems with keeping gazelles in captivity;
4. encourage national game reserves and parks in Pakistan, India, and Africa to report population trends and ecological information;
5. make an in-depth study of the diseases of gazelles, and their relevance to captive animals and to wild populations, and measures to control such disease;
6. study the feeding ecology of different species of gazelles in the wild to improve management potential of wild gazelles;
7. to encourage the study of gazelle behavior in the wild to facilitate their management and well-being in captivity;

8. to publish a newsletter twice, possibly three times per year, in which new information will be published, and to encourage people working with gazelles to submit articles for publication. The newsletter should also contain information on subjects not outlined above, e.g. growth rates, milk analysis, neonatal mortality, etc."

Steps have already been taken to implement some of these goals. Dr. Furley writes, "I am already well advanced in the planning of this unit. Dr. Colin Groves has undertaken to do the anatomical studies for species differentiation. I am currently writing a book on the diseases of captive and wild gazelles, mainly in the Middle East, and I have found an ecologist to study the feeding ecology of wild gazelle, funds permitting. I am also at this moment organising karyotying tests on a number of species of gazelles with the Max-Planck-Institute. I have several contacts in the reserves and parks of Africa. I work as a member of the International Zoo Veterinary Group, which is a practice specialising solely in the medicine of non-domestic species. I have developed an interest in gazelles in the Middle East during my tenure here, which I would like to expand. Some of our clients include the zoos in Spain which own Cuvier's gazelle and Mhorr gazelle, and the possibility of introducing these species, or Cuvier's gazelle at least, back into the wild, in controlled reserves, is not remote.

"I personally specialise in the medicine of ungulates in the wild and in captivity, hence my acquaintance with medical problems concerning gazelles.

"The International Zoo Veterinary Group has undertaken to kindly publish the newsletter. I believe I can arrange financial support from some of the oil companies here for the Studies Unit, in particular to pay for the karyotyping."

Saudi Arabia

Gil Child, head of FAO's Forest Resources Division, writes (6 Sept 1985): "I was interested in your remarks on the Arabian goitered gazelle (presumably G. subgutturosa marica). The FAO wildlife officer working in the Al Jouff region of NW Saudi Arabia reports a relict population in the Al Harrah area. He spotted three at Wadi Tarba on first April, 1984."

EUROPE

Spain

Montserrat Gomendio and Juan Escós, students at the University of Madrid who have been studying gazelle behavior at the Estación Experimental de Zonas Áridas (General Segura, 04001 Almería), have written (19 Sept 1984):

"On July, 1983, we finished Biology in Madrid and since then we belong to the Estación Experimental de Zonas Arídas of Almería as research students without financial support. In March 1984, we read our Master Theses: courtship behaviour of Gazella cuvieri in captivity (Gomendio) and Cuvier's gazelle, an ethological study and structural analysis of its behaviour (Escós) at the Complutense University of Madrid. We are now beginning our Ph.D. Theses: mother-infant relationship, behavioural and social development of Gazella cuvieri in captivity. A comparative study with G. dorcas and G. dama (Gomendio) and social structure in captive groups of G. cuvieri. A comparative study with groups of G. dorcas and G. dama (Escós). We have recently obtained a small grant for a year to start our theses."

Montserrat and Juan have spoken to Hartmut Jungius of their desire to participate in the projected reintroduction of G. cuvieri in Morocco (see Sept. 1982 Gnusletter). "We have a good knowledge of the behaviour of this species in captivity

but we think we need to learn more about other experiences of other species reintroductions. We would be very pleased if you could tell us about people we could contact to learn more about this subject and, on the other hand, people or Institutions that could give us some financial support."

ASIA

Tibet

A. J. Sellar (Sparrow Farm, Lanhill, Chippenham, Wilts SN 14 6LX, England) has managed to collect some information about the Tibetan antelope (Panthelops hodgsoni) of the high Tibetan Plateau. In a letter to Jane Thornback (20 Sept 1984), he reports:

"My informant was the Assistant Warden of the Koko Nor Bird Reserve based on Quinghai Lake. He claimed to have personal knowledge of these animals. He estimated there must be at least 100 Antelope in the two areas marked in ink on the map of the People's Republic of China, a photocopy of which I enclose.

The Tibetan Antelope territory, as described by one of the wardens at Bird Island is in the Tanggula Shan Range and quite a large area to the north of it in Quinghai Province.

Quaidam, previously spoken of as the habitat, lies somewhat further to the north and is probably less explored than the main mountain plateau.

It seems that the report I had previously of a sighting of Tibetan Antelope by an American guide (Tibetan-speaking) whom I met in Irkutsk, might just have been correct. The party was returning from Lhasa on a bus tour.

Let us hope there are other antelope surviving in Quaidam, or Psaidam as it is spelt sometimes."

"Unfortunately I could not find anyone who had been to China on the West or who had any knowledge of the high plains Chang Chen Mo in the area of the Pangong Lake, where I personally found a few Tibetan Antelope in 1930.

Whilst the chief Wild Life Warden in Srinagar had heard of Tibetan Antelope when I questioned him in Srinagar in the course of my return to Ladakh in 1980, he had no up-to-date information. I found a couple of Tibetan Antelope horns at separate stalls at Leh - as also a stuffed antelope head in the Kathi Temple of one of the monasteries also in Ladakh."

AFRICA

Algeria

The dorcas gazelle of the high plateaus north of the Atlas Mountains, Gazella dorcas massaesyla, may still survive in Algeria. A student of K. de Smet's from El Bayad told him some gazelles are left in the country to the west of his town, toward Mecheria. Furthermore, he knows townspeople who keep these gazelles in captivity. Mr. de Smet is anxious to start a captive herd at the Algiers Zoological Garden whose Director, Dr. Bouhmaza, has promised cooperation. However, there are problems, as de Smet described in a letter (10 Oct 1984) to Jane Thornback:

"Gazella is fully protected by law and the people who have them are poachers. So the Ministry just cannot go to them and negotiate buying some of the animals. I could, as an individual, and transport them to Algiers and hand them over to Dr. Bouhmaza .... [However], there would be a financial problem: I suppose that they will ask me at least 1000 DA (dinars) ($60), so this means that I would spend 6000-7000 DA to obtain enough animals to start a little herd.

"Could there be any financial support from IUCN for this? Proving expenditures will be very difficult because I doubt that the people I will be dealing with will

sign any receipts!"

Sudan

Chris Hillman remains actively interested in the antelopes of the Sudan. In his last letter (23 Sept 1984), he said, "I recently met a German pipeline engineer who had been putting an oil line through the Red Sea Hills, and he said there were two gazelle species still there - Port Sudan to Erkowit area - but could not accurately identify these. I will try to get more information when I am in Sudan in November... I am pushing for some attention to be paid to the desert and arid areas of Sudan which have no conservation protection at the moment to the best of my knowledge (there was an Erkowit Reserve in the thirties), yet may contain several important species."

Malawi

In the May, 1983 Gnusletter, Richard Bell outlined an antelope action plan to capture five puku (Kobus vardoni) males in the Luangwa Valley and translocate them to Kasungu N. P., where there are a number of females but no known males. This has now been accomplished, as described in Richard's letter of 8 Oct. 1984:

"You will be interested to know that last week we carried out the successful translocation of 5 juvenile male puku from the Luangwa Valley in Zambia to Kasungu National Park. This was the culmination of a very lengthy and complex exercise in bureaucracy that lasted for nearly two years. In the event, the actual translocation was fairly straightforward. We adopted blitzkrieg tactics, driving down one day (300 miles), reconnoitering the next, then catching and returning the next with the 5 young males (probably 9 to 12 months old) in a single large crate.

" It remains to be seen whether the exercise will result in breeding. The attitude of the 13 resident females towards one of the males which escaped from quarantine has been extremely aggressive; they have repeatedly charged it and chased it away, and it has now moved away from their vicinity, My hope is that when the males reach maturity they will be able to handle these old bags."

South Africa

Dr. Michael Keep of the Natal Parks, Game and Fish Preservation Board, who has become a member of the ASG in place of Don Stewart, has filed Antelope Inventory Report Forms for rare and endangered antelopes of Natal. Included are klipspringer, suni, and oribi, which are of special concern because of their low numbers and patchy distribution (klipspringer), and/or shrinkage of suitable habitat (suni and oribi).

The danger to the suni has been summed up by David Lawson, of Natal University's Institute for Natural Resources, who heads a suni research project:

"Much of the suni habitat of sand forest and thicket is being invaded by man and turned into cassava and pineapple plantations; in areas that are not proclaimed conservation estate, increased snaring is wiping out populations and within existing game reserves a lack of knowledge concerning forest habitats in general and the suni's place in that system in particular ensure that no positive management action can be taken to improve the position... Also the very problems that face our suni face those in Malawi, Mozambique and Kenya, so we need not be complacent in assuming the suni is all right in the rest of the continent." (Quoted from Quagga 5:21-22, Autumn, 1984).

The other 19 antelopes that are indigenous to Natal appear to be safe. In Dr. Keep's words, "All species are being cared for within the conservation areas..., and barring a national disaster it is unlikely that any will become extinct in the foreseeable future... In addition, many of the species are present outside nature and game reserves, such as on private farms and ranches, municipal land and State forestry land, often in large numbers, and often very adequately conserved."

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