

Hunter's Antelope

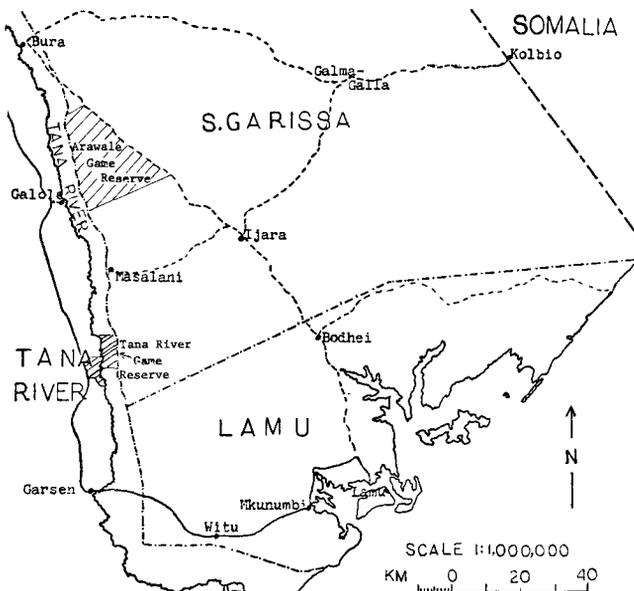
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In 1976 aerial counts showed that Hunter's antelopes in Kenya numbered a surprising 12,500 (the previous estimate was 1500), with more than 1500 in neighbouring Somalia. In Kenya the antelopes and the pastoralist tribes have achieved an equilibrium that permits a healthy antelope population, but this will be upset, to the detriment of the antelopes, when government plans for livestock improvement are put into effect. The author, who began his field study on Hunter's antelope in 1975, hopes that his work will provide the necessary information for conserving them despite the developments.

Previous estimates put the entire population of Hunter's antelope *Damaliscus hunteri* at no more than 1500 animals. This was Ian Grimwood's estimate in 1963, in *Oryx* 7, 4. However, five aerial counts in 1976 showed a population of 12,500, approximately eight times larger than was originally thought. Another 1000–2000 are estimated to occur in Somalia. The Kenya range covers some 12,000 sq km, mostly in Southern Garissa District, but with a small extension into the northwest section of Lamu District. In neighbouring Somalia the range is put at 2000–3000 sq km.

Major wet and dry season concentration areas are found near the Tana River between Masalani and Bura, an area of about 1000 sq km, and in the Galma Galla region, about 1500 sq km, which has a particularly high density in the dry season.

Annual rainfall within the antelope's range in Kenya varies from a little over 300 mm in the north to 600 mm in the south. Their preferred habitat lies in the 400 mm to 500 mm rainfall zone, an area of open grassland with brush with scattered trees and low shrubs, with fairly good grass cover (30–40 per cent) and a grass length of 10–50 cm. Only during the wet season when food is



of sufficient quantity or quality, are they found in significant numbers in the northern and southern parts of the range.

The range is a remote area where development has been minimal. Although there is some competition for water and grass between the antelopes and the nomadic Somali pastoralists' livestock, both are subject to similar environmental stresses, and the absence of western technology has forced the Somalis to graze their livestock in a manner similar to wild animals. This has kept livestock numbers far below what could be achieved with commercial ranching development, and several hundred years of co-existence has produced a balanced equilibrium between wild and domestic animals. Habitat conditions for the Hunter's antelope today are probably close to what they were decades ago, and the population is healthy.

But this situation could alter drastically with a change in land use. Government plans to develop the area include large-scale hydro-electric and irrigation schemes along the Tana River, and an increase in livestock numbers for commercial production. If these schemes are established on the east side of the Tana River, within the natural range of the Hunter's antelope, particularly in or near the antelope's wet and dry season concentration areas, they will cause serious inroads in the antelope's population. In opposition to these plans, Kenya's Department of Wildlife Conservation and Management is proposing the conservation of the region's wildlife, using the area's high potential for tourism to show a higher economic return. But much information on the wildlife ecology is needed before any firm stand can be made. Given data of this kind, which I hope my studies will provide, a workable compromise between these conflicting interests is very possible.

Kenya's New Primate Reserve

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Young crested mangabey



Two endangered monkeys, the Tana crested mangabey and the Tana red colobus, survive only in a small area of the Tana river in northern Kenya. The Government has now created a small reserve to protect them on land given up voluntarily by the local people. But the threat of a large irrigation project upstream could still jeopardise their survival. Mr Mkunga is Warden of the new reserve.

The Tana Primate Reserve is one of Kenya's newest conservation areas, covering 175 sq km of floodplain and terrace land on both banks of the lower