

# Somalia's Wildlife

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Having spent a year and a half in Mogadiscio, in 1965–66, and being keenly interested in the precarious status of wildlife in Somalia, I read with interest the note about it in the December 1969 issue of *ORYX* (pp. 145–146).

Although many species appear to be greatly reduced from their former populations in Somalia, it is still fairly easy to see large numbers of antelopes and gazelles in many parts of the country. The maritime plain along the east coast abounds in Thomson's gazelles. They seem to be most numerous at a point about 40 miles north of Uarsek, where on any day a hundred or more can be seen. This area also contains ostriches, gerenuk, warthogs, guinea fowl, and other species in great number. A natural area of broken bush and gently rolling hills, this would make a very attractive national park, but any tourism development would involve considerable road construction, and might therefore prove counter-productive.

On the grassy plains of the Scebeli River and east of Belet Uen (the southern interior of the country) there are still a few small herds of beisa oryx. Occasionally local tribes hunt them with bows and arrows or spears, and Mogadiscio's two professional white hunters also sometimes lead parties into this area to hunt oryx.

Greater and lesser kudu occur in limited numbers in the southern portion of the country (from about 30°N to the southern borders, adjoining Kenya). Burton's description, in *First Footsteps in East Africa*, of great herds of Soemmering's gazelle no longer holds true, although there are still small numbers. In Mogadiscio the local tannery displayed mounted horns of sable antelope taken some years ago in the area of Afmadu (inland from Chisimaio). None have been taken by hunters for several years now, and local residents generally concede that the species is extinct in Somalia.

Dik-dik are to be found in most areas of scrub bush and grasslands. The local tribes kill these small antelopes with bow and arrow and with snares, and make throw-rugs for sale to foreigners and tourists; it takes about twenty dik-dik pelts to make one such rug. As dik-dik seemed to be the most numerous of all antelopes when I was there, it is hard to say whether this hunting pressure has any effect on them.

It was possible to buy cheetah skins from local Somalis, even though their export was prohibited by Somali law. Their exploitation (and that of leopards) is probably responsible for the increases in Thomson's gazelles and also warthogs which were especially numerous in all parts of the country, and do considerable damage to crops; only the hyaena is left as a major predator. The Somalis (99 per cent Moslem) will not touch wild pigs, even to defend their crops, and therefore reproduction is nearly unchecked. The depletion of predators is also

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Western Ghana without government intervention. This is almost entirely due to lack of effective rifles. When farmers complain of serious crop damage the Wildlife Department sends scouts to assess the damage and the elephants' numbers and habits, after which an experienced rifleman is sent to shoot a certain number. All recent cullings here have involved two or three elephants. In 1962 two were shot six miles north of us, and last year a further two. The shooting is apparently effective in driving the elephants away for at least another year. They are generally shot in the open where they are easier to see and near to a village so that the distance to head-load meat is minimal. Men and women paid £1 and 10s respectively to head-load away as much meat as they could carry; the tusks go to the state.

To conclude: elephants in the Bia tributaries North and the Suku-suku forest reserves are plentiful and the damage they inflict is serious at certain times of year. A more thorough study is needed to determine the forest-carrying capacity with a view to controlling the population, possibly by more intensive culling.

### References

- CURRY-LINDAHL K. 1969 Report to the Government of Ghana on Conservation, Management and Utilisation of Ghana's wildlife resources. IUCN Pubs. New Series, Suppl. Paper No. 18.  
JEFFREY S. M. 1970 Ghana's Forest Wildlife in Danger. *Oryx*, May 1970, page 240.

### Ghana's Forest Wildlife in Danger

Mrs Jeffreys sends the following additions to the list of species included in her article on the forest wildlife of Ghana in the May *ORYX*, page 242:

*Aethosciurus poensis*: occasional specimens.

*Heliosciurus rufobrachium*: suspected to be common.

*Dendrohyrax dorsalis*: very common.

*Manis tricuspis*: common.

*M. gigantea*: one recorded in Suku-suku.

*Loxodonta africana* was also accidentally omitted.

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responsible for the increase in size and numbers of baboon troops, which wreak havoc in the crops and banana plantations.

The situation may have improved in the past four years, but during my stay there were virtually no controls on hunting. A licence was required, costing about \$10, but I never heard of anyone being stopped and checked for his licence, the species of kill, etc. A technical close season, from April until September, which did not include warthogs or wildfowl, was generally ignored.

Since the recent *coup d'état* in Mogadiscio, it is possible that the new government will take a more active part in wildlife conservation than its predecessors. There is still much in Somalia worth saving, and it is gratifying to see someone doing something about it.