

# Current Status of Antelopes in Somaliland



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Cover photo: Beira antelope *Dorcatagus megalotis*. © D. Mallon/ASG

Back cover: Speke's Gazelle *Gazella spekei* © D. Mallon/ASG

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

The arid Horn of Africa is considered a biodiversity hotspot due to the high number of endemic species of fauna and flora that it contains. These include five species of antelopes. Information on the biodiversity of the region is rather scarce, especially on Somalia because of long standing issues of security. Greater stability in the northern part of the country, Somaliland, has allowed some data to be collected, although recent visits have mainly been short.

This report collates the results of one field trip and other visits and is intended to summarise the current status of antelopes in Somaliland and to synthesise the available historical information, as a baseline for further and more detailed research.

### 1.2. Somaliland

The British Protectorate of Somaliland gained independence on 26 June 1960 and joined together with former Italian Somaliland on 1 July 1960 to form the Republic of Somalia. In 1991 the central government collapsed and Somaliland declared its independence. It has been a self-governing territory since then, though it is not recognized internationally.

Somaliland lies between about 8<sup>00</sup>-11<sup>0</sup>N and 42<sup>0</sup>30-49<sup>0</sup>E and covers an area of approximately 137,600 km<sup>2</sup>. It shares land borders with the Puntland region of Somalia on the east, Ethiopia on the west and south, and Djibouti on the north-west. There is a 750-km coastline along the Gulf of Aden. The human population is estimated at 3.5 million ([www.unpo.org](http://www.unpo.org)).

#### 1.2.1. Geographical regions

The three principal geographical zones are: a coastal plain, backed by a range of hills and mountains, and an interior plateau (*Haud*). 1. The narrow coastal plain (*Guban*) along the Gulf of Aden reaches up to 35 km in width. 2. A range of hills and mountains known variously as Ogo and the Golis Range, runs west-east; it is lower in the west, reaching its highest point of 2408 m at Shimbiris in the east. In places there are steep escarpments and dramatic cliffs hundreds of metres high, notably at Ga'an Libaax and Daallo. 3. To the south of the mountains, a plateau slopes gently southward towards the Ogaden region of Ethiopia with an elevation generally over 1200 m. Hargeisa the capital is situated at 1348 m. The plateau, or the southern part of it is known as the Haud.

#### 1.2.2. Climate

There are four seasons: The main rains (*gu*) fall in April–June and shorter rains (*dair*) in September–October. Precipitation ranges from 200-500 mm across much of the country, reaching 800 mm on the highest parts of the Golis range. July and August are the hottest months. The coastal plain is much hotter than the highlands and the plateau.

#### 1.2.3. Vegetation

Detailed descriptions of the vegetation and soils of Somaliland are provided by Hemming (1966, 1998), on which the following brief summary is based.

##### Coastal zone

There are many sandy areas particularly in the west, containing the perennial grasses *Lasiurus scindicus* and *Panicum turgidum* and scattered trees, most commonly *Balanites orbicularis*, *Acacia tortilis* and *Boscia minimiflora*. There are also patches of mangroves, e.g. near Zeila, and halophytic plant communities.

### Mountains

Patches of relict juniper *Juniperus procera* woodland occur at the highest elevations, the trees draped with hanging lichens such as *Usnea articulata*. Rainfall reaches 800 mm in this zone and the effects of mist and dew are also important. Small patches of juniper woodland occur at Ga'an Libaax and Wagar; the most extensive remnant is at Daallo Forest, north of Ceerigaabo (Erigavo), and this continues east to Cal Madow in Puntland at about 49°E. This zone is subject to heavy grazing and there is very little regeneration of juniper. Below the junipers is a zone of evergreen shrubs consisting mainly of *Buxus hildebrandtii*, *Cadia purpurea* and *Dodonaea viscosa*, usually in mixed stands, but monodominant stands of *Buxus* also occur. On the northern side of the escarpment at Dallo Forest is species-rich mixed forest that in addition to the species above contains *Dracaena ombet*, *Euphorbia abyssinica*, *Rhus somalensis*, *Aloe eminens* (a tree aloe) and other *Aloe* spp.

### Plateau

South of the main highlands and below the evergreen scrub zone is a band of *Acacia etbaica* bushland and woodland, occurring mainly on limestone soils. The many flat-topped limestone hills on the plateau with scattered *A. etbaica* trees form a typical habitat of beira. Below that is a very widespread zone consisting of open woodland, dominated by *A. bussei* and also containing *A. tortilis*, and species of *Commiphora* and *Balanites*. Open grasslands or 'bans' are found within this zone. The largest of these plains are Ban Tuyu (670 km<sup>2</sup>) and Aroori plains south of Burco (570 km<sup>2</sup>). Perennial grasses such as *Chrysopogon plumulosus*, *Dactyloctenium scindicum* *Sporolobus* spp. and other grasses have been heavily grazed by livestock.

### Haud mixed bush

This zone covers a small area in the south of Somaliland and extends east into Puntland and south through the Ogaden to north-east Kenya. It is characterised by *Acacia-Commiphora* woodland and bushland and contains other trees such as *Albizia anitihelminthica*, *Delonix elata*, *D. baccal*, *Terminalia orbicularis* and species of *Grewia* and *Boswellia*. In Somaliland, much of this zone is underlain by reddish calcareous sands, forming the 'red sand bush' preferred by the Dibatag.

### Nuqaal Valley

The upper part of the valley consists of a gypseous plain in the south-east of Somaliland running east into Puntland. There are sparse trees, mainly *Acacia tortilis* and *Commiphora* spp. as well as shrubs such as *Cadaba heterotricha*.

## **2. Methods**

Information was gathered on a field trip in July 2010, other recent trips, from a search of the literature and from web sources.

### **2.1. Field trip**

A field survey was carried out 3-17 July 2010 by AAJ (Nature Somaliland) and DM (IUCN/SSC Antelope Specialist Group). The objective was to make a rapid assessment survey of antelope status, with a focus on the near-endemic Speke's Gazelle and Beira.

The route (Fig. 1) began at Loyada at the border with Djibouti, crossed the Giriyaad Plains and ascended onto the plateau and headed eastwards to Hargeisa. Some time was spent in the 'Beira Hills' to the east of the city in search of Beira, before continuing to Inafmadobe and Burco. From there, we investigated the Aroori plains to the south and then travelled further south to Qorilogud, towards the Ethiopian border. From there we returned north and travelled across the vast Ban Tuyu and Ban Cade plains to Ceerigaabo and up to Daallo Forest at the top of the escarpment in the north-east and down to the coastal plain at Maydh and back. From Erigavo, we crossed the Sarar plains to



Burco and thence north to the Busti hills on the coast, then to Berbera, before returning on the main road to Hargeisa and flying to Djibouti. This itinerary passed through all the major habitats and extended as far south and east as was considered safe at that time. In total 2000 km were covered by vehicle. A few semi-structured interviews were carried out with local people and village elders to collect information on recent status.



Figure 1. Map of Somaliland showing the route of the field trip (blue line)

## 2.2. Other trips

AAJ / Somaliland Nature made a number of other surveys 2010-2013; several bird watching tours visited the country, some also organized by Somaliland Nature, and produced incidental mammal records. Lorenz (2010) reported mammal sightings made on a 5-day visit to Puntland consisting of a 260-km survey along the road from Garowe to Galkayo, and short drives in the Nogaal Valley.

## 2.3. Published sources

From the late 1880s, British colonial administrators travelled widely and military officers and others from Aden visited Somaliland for big-game hunting. Several of these published accounts of their travels and hunts, providing information on mammals encountered (and usually shot). A more systematic early account of the mammals of Somaliland was provided by Drake-Brockman (1910). There is however, an important caveat relating to these old reports: the border between Somaliland and Ethiopia was not formally demarcated until the 1920s and before that date travellers ranged widely across the region and did not always differentiate between localities visited within the current borders of Somaliland and what is now the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. A government handbook on Somaliland by Hunt (1951) includes a useful short summary of the larger mammals, but this publication is not easily obtainable.

A monograph on the mammals of Ethiopia (Yalden et al. 1984) also described and mapped species distributions northern Somalia, which provide a very useful record of geographical localities where specimens were obtained. Simonetta (1988) summarized the status of antelopes in Somalia as a whole. Recent research on the mammals of Somaliland has been extremely sparse and there are few examples of original field research in recent years or decades.

In addition to works on vegetation cited above (Hemming 1966, 1998), a four-volume Flora of Somalia has been produced (Thulin 1993, 1995, 2009a, 2009b). A guide to the birds of Somalia was published by Ash and Miskell (1998). Several websites were also consulted for recent information.

### 3. Status of antelopes

Thirteen species of antelopes have been recorded in Somaliland (Drake-Brockman 1910; Funaioli and Simonetta 1966; Yalden et al. 1984) (Table 1). One species has been extirpated and two more have not been recorded in recent years and are also considered locally extinct. Eight species are still present, having been recorded on the 2010 field trip and by other recent observers, and two more species appear to be still present, on the basis of field signs and local reports.

**Table 1. Antelopes recorded in Somaliland**

Species	Global Red List status (2016)	Current status
Lesser Kudu <i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i>	Near Threatened	Apparently still present; captive animals seen in Hargeisa
Greater Kudu <i>Tragelaphus strepisceros</i>	Least Concern	Apparently still present; recent reports from Ga'an Libaax
Beira <i>Dorcatragus megalotis</i>	Vulnerable	Widely but thinly distributed in suitable habitat
Salt's Dik-dik <i>Madoqua saltiana</i>	Least Concern	Widespread and common
Günther's Dik-dik <i>Madoqua guentheri</i>	Least Concern	Restricted to a small area of the south
Speke's Gazelle <i>Gazella spekei</i>	Endangered	Scattered throughout the plains from at least 44°35'42"E eastwards
Dorcas Gazelle <i>Gazella dorcas</i>	Vulnerable	Only on the northern coastal plain
Soemmerring's Gazelle <i>Nanger soemmerringi</i>	Vulnerable	Only reported recently on the Aroori and Giriyaad plains
Dibatag <i>Ammodorcas clarkei</i>	Vulnerable	Not seen for 50-60 years. Possibly still occur in Nogaal valley in the extreme east
Gerenuk <i>Litocranius walleri</i>	Near Threatened	Widely but thinly spread
Klipspringer <i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	Least Concern	Present in places along the main mountain range
Swayne's Hartebeest <i>Alcelaphus buselaphus swaynei</i>	EN (species LC)	Became extinct in the early 20 <sup>th</sup> century
Beisa Oryx <i>Oryx beisa</i>	NT (2008)	Formerly widespread, now extirpated

Recent information is fragmentary and little research has been carried out in recent decades. The data available are not good enough to make meaningful estimates of density or population size. However, comparisons with earlier descriptions indicate that all species, apart from Salt's Dik-dik, have undergone large declines in range and numbers.

**Soemmerring's Gazelle *Nanger soemmerringi* (Somali: *aoul*)**

Former distribution seems to have been wide but patchy. Drake-Brockman (1910) listed the following localities: Arori, near Bulhar, Tuyo and plains west and south-west of Hargeisa. Swayne (1903) said the Bulhar coastal plain in the north-west '*used to be full of them, but so persecuted by sportsmen that they have retired some distance*'. Hunt (1951) said the species could be found on any open plain and was very common in some areas.

Its range and numbers have shrunk markedly in Somaliland. The only sites where the species has been recorded recently are on the Giriyaad plains and near Zeila in the north-west, and on the Aroori plains south of Burco.

AAJ counted up to 50 animals on the Giriyaad plains grazing on green vegetation after the rains in May 2010. Five individuals were seen there in a shallow wadi in July 2010. AAJ saw a group of 21 on the Aroori Plains in September 2010. None were seen in any of the central plains and the villagers said they no longer occurred. Sommerlatte and Umar (1999) estimated 563 Soemmerring's Gazelle in a 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> survey area in NW Somaliland. Soemmerring's Gazelle was not seen in Puntland by Lorenz (2010). Simonetta (1988) said that across Somalia the species had been eliminated from much of its former range and though formerly extremely abundant it had been greatly reduced by poaching and habitat degradation.

The Soemmerring's Gazelles seen on Giriyaad in 2010 were lying in scraped out hollows 15–25 cm deep and in the shade of trees. The temperature at the time was 41°C and a hot wind was blowing.



**Fig. 2. Soemmerring's Gazelle on Giriyaad plains (© A.A. Jama)**



**Speke's Gazelle *Gazella spekei* (Somali: *dhero*)**

This species is endemic to Somalia and bordering areas of Ethiopia (Yalden et al. 1984; Simonetta 1988, Thurow 2013). According to Drake-Brockman (1910) the species was widespread and common throughout Somaliland south of the Golis range. Swayne (1903) saw the species near Hargeisa. Funaioli and Simonetta (1966) mapped the distribution west to about 44°E but Simonetta 1988 indicated that the western limit had retreated to c. 46°E.

On the 2010 field trip, a total of 145 Speke's Gazelles were seen in groups numbering 1-9 animals. The westernmost sightings were on the lower slopes of Ga'an Libaax at 09°39'49" N, 44°35'42" E and at 09°39'54" N, 44°37'12" E on the Ban Ounounouf plain, at the western edge of the Ban Tuyu. Speke's Gazelle was also observed on the Ban Cade and Sarar plains. AAJ observed 40 Speke's Gazelles on the Aroori plains in late July 2010 and another group there in June 2012. A Birdquest group saw 155 Speke's Gazelles in small groups in September 2012, mainly on Ban Cade (N. Redman *in litt.*); in February 2010 up to 30/day were seen on a similar itinerary (H. Buck, *in litt.*).

Speke's Gazelle appears to be still widely but thinly distributed on the open plains of Somaliland, west at least to 44°35'42" E (Fig. 3). It is not clear whether the westernmost sightings in 2010 represent recent reoccupation of this part of the former range or if they had in fact been overlooked previously. In at least two villages, elders reported that the species 'was coming back'. Lorenz (2010) recorded the species in Puntland along the road between Garowe and Galkayo, including one herd of 30-40 near Burtinle, and 5-6 groups in the Nogaal valley.

Speke's Gazelles were seen on open grassy plains with grass and sparse shrubs; occasionally in open *Acacia bussei* bush; stony hillsides with sparse *Acacia etbaica* and *Buxus hildebrandtii* bushes at 1650 m on Ga'an Libaax. Three groups of gazelles were seen feeding close to houses indicating a lack of regular persecution. We saw no Speke's Gazelles in the 'red sand bush' of the southern Haud, in line with Hunt's (1951) observation that Speke's Gazelle is not common where Dibatag occurs.

East (1999) estimated the total population in the tens of thousands. There is no estimate for the Somaliland sector of the range. Speke's Gazelle is traditionally not hunted by pastoralists in some parts of their range but they have been eliminated by soldiers and paramilitaries along roads in areas of conflict, such as along the Ethiopian border and other areas of civil conflict (Thurow 2013). There is also evidence of increased trade in live animals to the Gulf countries facilitated by the introduction of new trapping techniques and wooden transport crates since the 1990s (Amir 2006).



**Fig. 3. Recent sightings of Speke's Gazelle in Somaliland**





**Fig. 4. Male Speke's Gazelle on Ban Ounounouf plains. © D. Mallon/ASG**



**Fig 5. Captive Speke's Gazelle in Hargeisa © A.A. Jama**

**Dorcas Gazelle** *G. dorcas pelzelni* (Somali: *dhero*)

Dorcas Gazelles in Somalia are usually assigned to the subspecies *pelzelni*. The species has only ever been recorded on the coastal plain, north of the Golis range. Hunt (1951) said it occurred up to about 600 m. The species is still present on the coastal plain but apparently in low numbers. Funaioli and Simonetta (1966) mapped its range extending almost to 50°E in Puntland. Sommerlatte and Umar (1999) estimated 281 Dorcas Gazelles in a 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> survey area in NW Somaliland.

In 2010 a few Dorcas Gazelles were seen in sandy *Acacia-Balanites* bush at Fada Dhero on the coastal plain, south-east of Berbera and tracks and droppings were visible more widely in vegetated dry valleys in the Busti hills. Dorcas Gazelles have also been observed recently west of Berbera and in the north-west near Zeila. Locals refer to this species and *G. spekei* as 'dhero'; the two species are allopatric and separated by the Golis range.



**Fig. 6. Dorcas Gazelle (*G. d. pelzelni*) © D. Mallon/ASG**

**Beira *Dorcotragus megalotis*** (Somali: *baira*)

This species is endemic to northern Somalia, extending into southern Djibouti and marginally into Ethiopia (Yalden *et al.* 1984; Giotto 2013). Drake-Brockman (1910) said that it was found on most of the flat-topped hills in Somaliland. Hunt (1951) said the Beira was “*not uncommon and occurs on the hills of the main watershed mountains and small hills in the plains*”. Yalden *et al.* (1984) listed all the known localities for the species and mapped 17 localities in Somaliland, from the west and through the mountains and parts of the plateau, reaching close to the coast. Funaioli and Simonetta (1966) showed the species ranging across northern Somalia from the east coast, including many localities in Puntland.

In Somaliland recent records have been obtained from several sites on the plateau and in the main mountain range. Beira have been regularly observed in the 'Beira Hills' east of Hargeisa. On the 2010 field trip Beira were seen at five sites in low hills on the plateau and field signs and local reports were recorded in three more, including the coastal hills at Busti. The localities were widely distributed from the NW border eastwards to Hargeisa and Ga'an Libaax, farther east along the Golis range and in the coastal zone at Busti. It seems reasonable to assume that Beira distribution remains much the same as described by Drake-Brockman (19110) and Hunt (1951) and that it occurs widely but locally in suitable habitat.

In Puntland 11 (7+4) Beira were seen in Cal Madow in 2009 and local people reported their presence between Eldohar village and Badgan district (A. Hersi, *in litt.*). According to local reports, Beira occurred in 1997 in limestone hills north-east of Garowe, approx. 8°17.407N, 48°17.036E (P. Moehlmann, *in litt.*).

The species' presence in Djibouti was only confirmed in 1993, when they were observed on hillsides at two sites in the south-east of the country, close to the borders with Somalia and Ethiopia (Künzel and Künzel 1998). Recent surveys have shown that the area of distribution in Djibouti is about 250 km<sup>2</sup> and located in the mountainous Ali Sabieh-Arrey-Assamo region (Laurent et al. 2001, Giotto et al. 2013). In Ethiopia the only localities where it has been reported are near Aroweina and Bio Anot in the Marmar mountains, bordering Somaliland. The last confirmed records are from 1976 and no information on its current status in Ethiopia is available (Bekele and Yalden 2013).

Funaioli and Simonetta (1966) said Beira was nowhere common. Simonetta (1988) cited reliable reports that a marked local decrease took place in the 1975 drought and that numbers had not recovered. East (1999) estimated the global Beira population in the low thousands, based on an average density of 0.2/km<sup>2</sup>. In Djibouti numbers have been estimated at 50–150 with local densities reaching 7/km<sup>2</sup> (Giotto et al. 2013). However, extrapolating from either of these figures is problematic because the species is local and patchily distributed in suitable habitat and there is no reliable figure for the area of occupancy. It seems likely that the total population still numbers several thousand.

Typical Beira habitat on the plateau consists of flat-topped hills with steep slopes covered in loose stones and scree and containing *Acacia etbaica*, *Commiphora* spp. and shrubs such as *Croton somalensis*. Such habitat occurs widely across the north of Somaliland. Sites in the main Golis range tend to more rugged but there are no reports from the steepest sites.

Ten groups of Beira (numbering 2-6) were seen during the field trip and observed at length, allowing some observations on behaviour. Beira are wary and run in a very agile way over loose stones and scree once alarmed. Groups often rested in the shade of *A. etbaica* and other trees. One group was first seen at 11:20 on a slope at the foot of a steep hill and observed for 1.5 hours as they moved slowly upwards, grazing and browsing occasionally on *Commiphora* sp. and *Acacia etbaica*. Field signs were found in several places at the base of the hills and local reports confirmed that Beira graze in flatter areas at night and move back onto steeper slopes during the day. AAJ has also observed groups of Beira crossing the flat plains between hills.

Beira appeared to use shallow scrapes where loose stones had been removed for resting and sleeping. The droppings are small and pointed and often made in a cluster or in distinctive latrines that can be a useful indicator of the species' presence. Latrines are also often associated with small scrapes made with the forefeet, leaving a shallow hollow with a small mound of earth or gravel. Scrapes may be made back-to-back or parallel to each other. One male was seen to make a scrape, then squat on it to deposit dung; a female then approached soon after and sniffed the scrape



(Mallon & Jama 2012). The scrapes appear to be a form of territorial marking and may also serve to communicate reproductive status.

Beira are small in size and are not easy to approach so hunting may not pose a major threat. In recent years, live capture for trade to private collections in the Gulf has emerged as a local threat but the extent is difficult to quantify. Local people around the Busti Hills complained that '*they came and took our beira*' and were initially reluctant to assist on the field trip as they feared we had arrived for the same purpose. Trappers have been reportedly active in the 'Beira Hills' near Hargeisa. Cutting of trees especially *Acacia etbaica* for charcoal is a widespread problem and is likely to have a negative impact by removing the main source of shade.



**Fig. 7. Beira group. © D. Mallon/ASG**





**Fig. 8. Beira scraping (left) and marking scrape (right). © D. Mallon/ASG**



**Fig. 9. Typical Beira habitat in Somaliland. © D. Mallon/ASG**

**Salt's Dik-dik *Madoqua saltiana* (Somali: *sagaro*)**

A common and widespread species, seen on every day of the 2010 field trip and widely reported by other recent groups. Its latrines are visible almost everywhere. It was recorded on the coastal plains and up to 2129 m in the evergreen scrub zone at Daallo Forest; in *Acacia bussei* and *Acacia-Commiphora* bush, red sand bush, rocky scrubland and degraded scrub, but not in the most open low grass plains. It occurs wherever some cover exists and is reportedly seen in larger gardens of Hargeisa. Hunt (1951) said the species occurred almost everywhere with low cover and speculated that there must be a million in Somaliland. Lorenz (2010) saw this species regularly in Puntland between Garowe and Galkayo. It is highly likely that the near-absence of village dogs is another very positive factor.

Five subspecies were described by Yalden *et al.* (1984), based on phenotype, though Yalden (2013) admitted these forms may be clinal. *M. s. phillipsi* is the form most often recorded in Somaliland (Yalden *et al.* 1984), though *hararensis* and *saltiana* were also mapped on the border with Djibouti. All animals seen by us except one matched the phenotype of *phillipsi* showing conspicuous orange brown or rufous on the undersides, throat, inside legs and extending onto the flanks in a wedge shape that sometimes reached the shoulder. The exception was a single individual with coat showing darker orange to chestnut red, closely matching the description of *hararensis*.

**Guenther's Dik-dik *Madoqua guentheri* (Somali: *ghussleh*)**

Drake-Brockman (1910) said this species occurred in southern Somaliland and Funaioli and Simonetta (1966) mapped the species only in the extreme south-eastern corner. Yalden *et al.* (1984) did not report any records or sites in Somaliland. Simonetta (1988) mapped *M. guentheri*, *M. saltiana* and *M. kirki* together and showed a wide combined distribution, covering most of central and southern Somaliland, plus a strip on the coast north of Erigavo. This map is presumably the source of the wider distribution of Guenther's Dik-dik in Somaliland, including the north coast, shown by later authors: however, there are no confirmed records of this species outside the south.

The only locality where Guenther's Dik-dik has been recorded recently is near Hurayda in southern Somaliland (around 8°47'3" N, 46°13'40"E). On the 2010 field trip, eight groups of 1-5 individuals were seen in that area in low, stony hills covered with patches of dense thorn scrub. This is similar to the habitat preference described for the species by Hoppe & Brotherton (2013). Several other tour groups have also seen the species in this area. Local people at Hurayda referred to Guenther's as *ghussleh* and Salt's as *sagaro*) and described the two species by their appearance, saying that Gunther's was only found in the hilly areas. At all other locations, local people reported only one kind of dik-dik (*sagaro*) present and did not recognize the name *ghussli*, including in the Cerigaabo-Daallo area of the north.

Guenther's Dik-dik is easily distinguished from Salt's Dik-dik (which occurs in the same locality) by its larger size, grizzled, grey-brown coat lacking any trace of rufous, and an elongated muzzle. Guenther's Dik-dik latrines can also be differentiated by the larger and more elongated pellets. A few instances were found of the droppings of both species occurring on the same latrine.

In Puntland, Lorenz (2010) recorded this species regularly between Garowe and Galkayo, but said it was more common in the south, with Salt's Dik-dik predominating in the north.





Fig. 10. Salt's Dik-dik (left) and Guenther's Dik-dik (right). © D. Mallon/ASG.

**Dibatag *Ammodorcas clarkei*** (Somali: *dibatag*)

Formerly occurred in southern Somaliland. Drake-Brockman (1910) described the distribution as much larger than usually supposed. Swayne (1903) said it was “*common enough but very local*”. He named Tue south of Ban Tuyo as their western limit and said they more plentiful further east toward Burco. Hunt (1951) and Yalden et al. (1984) mapped localities where specimens had been obtained (Fig. x). Funaioli and Simonetta (1966) mapped a similar but rather more extensive range. Simonetta (1988) showed it as no longer occurring in Somaliland.

There have been no recent reports. We visited localities within the known former range near Qorilogud, about 60 km from the Ethiopian border in the ‘red sand’ habitat characteristic of the species. Local people said that Dibatag had not been seen in the region for the last 40 years. Other local reports suggested Dibatag may still be present farther east in the Nogaal valley and near Las Anood, but it was not considered safe to survey that area. Pearce (1913) noted that it often occurred where patches of tall *duur* grass (*Andropogon*) were frequent. Hunt (1951) said only that it was found in similar situations to Gerenuk and Lesser Kudu.



Figure 12. Former distribution of Dibatag in Somaliland (after Yalden et al. 1984).

**Gerenuk *Litocranius walleri*** (Somali: *garanug*)

Gerenuk was described as the commonest antelope in Somaliland by Drake-Brockman (1910) and very common in thick bush by Hunt (1951). Funaioli and Simonetta (1966) described the Gerenuk as the commonest and most widespread species across the whole of Somalia.

Gerenuk were observed at seven locations during the 2010 field trip, in groups numbering 1-20, from west of Hargeisa eastwards in *Acacia* and mixed bush. The species has been reported by other recent groups and it appears to remain widely but thinly distributed. In Puntland, Lorenz (2010) recorded Gerenuk regularly along the road between Garowe and Galkayo.

**Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus*** (Somali: *alikut, alakut*)



This species is distributed on steep slopes along the main mountain range (Hunt 1951). A group of three was observed in July 2010 on the north slope of the Daallo escarpment at around 1500 m elevation on steep, rocky slopes in thick bush. The animals were observed from a distance of 50 m for 10 minutes. Klipspringers have also been seen recently at the Ga'an Libaax escarpment in February 2010 and west of Hargeisa and on the Sheikh escarpment in 2012. Klipspringers in Somaliland have been assigned to *O. o. somalicus* but the validity of this subspecies has not been confirmed genetically.

**Fig. 11. Klipspringers below Daallo escarpment. © D. Mallon/ ASG.**

**Greater Kudu *Tragelaphus strepciseros*** (Somali: *godir*)

Drake-Brockman (1910) said the Greater Kudu was numerous all along the Golis range and Yalden et al. (1984) show widely spread localities. Hunt (1951) said it did not occur in great numbers except in the mountains north of Borama. There are no recent sightings but the species is reported to occur around Ga'an Libaax according to Mirreh (2012), and there are persistent local reports from the area. In 2010 we found tracks and droppings in dense bush at Ga'an Libaax that were a good match for this species.

**Lesser Kudu *T. imberbis*** (Somali: *arreh godir*)

Not uncommon in thick bush according to Hunt (1951) and mapped at five localities in western Somaliland by Yalden et al. (1984). None were seen on the 2010 field trip and no recent sightings have been reported by other groups. However, photographs of captive Lesser Kudu kept as pets at hotels in Hargeisa were shown by Mirreh (2012) and photos of another captive specimen in Hargeisa were shown to DM by Eric Ruivo, Lisbon Zoo, in 2012.



**Swayne's Hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus swaynei* (Somali: *sig*)**

Formerly occurred on open plains west and south-west of Hargeisa as far as the Tuyo plains where they were seen in the thousands (Swayne 1895; Drake-Brockman 1910). The species became extinct in Somaliland in the early 1900s due to rinderpest, according to Hunt (1951). Village elders interviewed at two localities on the Sarar and Tuyo plains did not recognise the species from descriptions or from its Somali name, so the hartebeest may have also disappeared from the memory of at least some of the local communities.

**Beisa Oryx *Oryx beisa* (Somali: *bi'iid, beid*)**

Formerly common and widespread (Drake-Brockman 1910). Hunt (1951) said the species used to be common in all the plains and bushy parts of the Haud and that former 'huge herds' on coastal plains behind Bulhar and Zeila had been reduced to two small groups at Qabri Behar and Jideh; it was most frequently seen on the gypseous plains of the south-east. None were seen on the 2010 field trip and there are no other recent records or local reports. It appears that the species no longer occurs in Somaliland. Beisa Oryx also no longer occur in Puntland according to local reports (Lorenz 2010). Its hide was valued for shields and whips (Hunt 1951).

**Other ungulates:**

**Desert Warthog *Phacoceros aethiopicus* (Somali: *dofar*)**

Reported recently and seen at seven sites in 2010 in open plains, sparse woodland and bush and above 2000 m scrub in Daallo Forest. It is not hunted as it is regarded as unclean.

**African Wild Ass *Equus africanus* (Somali: *gumburi*)**

There are very few records of this species in Somaliland and no recent reports.



**Fig. 13. Desert Warthog. © D. Mallon/ASG**

**Predators:**

**Lion *Panthera leo* (Somali: *libaah*)**

Lions were once widespread in Somaliland but according to Drake-Brockman (1910) '*..now seldom seen far distant from the Haud and Nogaal Valley*' (i.e. only in remote areas) and he described them as comparatively rare, but occasionally wandering to the Golis range. However, Hunt (1951) said Lions were quite common and widely distributed. The current status is unclear and there are no recent reports. Two young animals have been confiscated but their origin is unknown.

**Common Leopard** *Panthera pardus* (Somali: *shebel*)

Formerly plentiful (Drake-Brockman (1910). Hunt (1951) said that leopards were becoming rare owing to the high price of the skins. About 2000 skins exported from Somaliland to Aden in 1928, when there were quite a lot in the Berbera lowlands; the sale of leopard skins was prohibited in 1928 because people were using the telephone wires between Berbera and Sheikh for snares (Hunt 1951). There are far fewer now and not many recent reports. Leopard presence was reported by local people at Daallo Forest and Ga'an Libaax where a possible scat was found.

**Cheetah** *Acinonyx jubatus* (Somali: *harimad*)

Drake-Brockman (1910) said the Cheetah was widespread but most common on the Haud. Hunt (1951) said the species was 'fairly common'. There are few recent records and it was feared the species was extinct. However, local people in the 'Beira Hills' east of Hargeisa claimed that Cheetahs were still present and AAJ spent 3 days in September 2010 following up these reports. In a small village he found an adult female captured after attacking goats. He purchased the animal and released it 40 km away. In early October 2010 he located two cheetah cubs that had been caught by a poacher in the same general area. He purchased these too and returned them to the site where they had been captured. Two days later, tracks of an adult and two young were found and it was hoped that the female had located the cubs. Since then there have been several confiscations of adult and young cheetahs in Somaliland but it is not clear how many of these are locally caught or have been traded from elsewhere.

**Other carnivores:** Common Jackal *Canis aureus* has recently been reported at many several sites and it appears to be widespread; Bat-eared Fox *Otocyon megalotis* has been seen twice on the Aroori plains; Spotted Hyena *Crocuta crocuta*: reported in 2012 and one was possibly seen while driving at night in July 2010; Aardwolf *Proteles cristata* has been seen twice.

**Other species:** Hamadryas Baboon *Papio hamadryas* (Somali: *dayer*): About 150 were present at the rubbish tip outside Burco in July 2010 and small groups were seen in the forest below the Dallo escarpment and elsewhere. Abyssinian Hare *Lepus habessinicus* Plain Ground Squirrel *Xerus rutilus* are also widespread and the endemic Speke's Pectinator *Pectinator spekei* was seen in a few localities.



**Fig. 14. Hamadryas Baboon (left) and Speke's Pectinator (right). © D. Mallon/ASG**

## 4. Threats

The available data are descriptive and/or speculative. There is no quantified evidence of their impact on antelopes and this is an important area for further study.

### 4.1. Hunting

Hunting has several times been listed as the main cause of antelope declines. The first wave of trophy hunting from about 1885-1910 caused a rapid decline in the larger fauna, notably Black Rhino, Elephant and Lion, but with an unknown impact on antelope populations. In more recent times, wars and civil conflicts surely had a serious negative effect. Thurow (2013) noted that across its range Speke's Gazelle had been reduced in areas of conflict. At one village on Ban Tuyu, a local elder recalled the days when the surrounding plains teemed with Beisa Oryx, Soemmerring's Gazelle, Speke's Gazelle, and Wild Ass and lamented "*...the arrival in the 1970s of the Kalashnikov that began the destruction of these herds*" adding that Speke's Gazelle seemed to be returning and that they had resolved not to hunt them as they had enough sheep and goats for food.

During the 2010 field trip (14 days, 2000 km covered) only 3 people other than police were seen carrying a firearm and there does not seem to be a big tradition of eating wild meat, so it is unclear whether or not hunting is currently a major threat to antelopes. Species such as Beira may be favoured by their small size making them an unattractive target and their habitat and wary nature offering some protection.

### 4.2. Wildlife trade

Antelopes are sometimes caught and kept as pets by VIPs and in hotels: e.g. Mirreh (2012) showed photos of captive Lesser Kudu, Gerenuk, Speke's and Dorcas Gazelles at establishments in Hargeisa. A bigger threat is likely to be posed by live capture of animals for trade to the Gulf countries where the many private collections provide a ready market for wildlife. Amir (2006) reported on the expanding illegal wildlife trade from southern Somalia that affected many species including Speke's Gazelle and which had been facilitated by the advent of new trapping techniques and specialised wooden boxes for transport. Trapping of animals in Somaliland for export has also increased considerably.

One report in the International Business Times stated that Somaliland has become a regional centre for illegal trade in cheetahs ([www.ibtimes.co.uk](http://www.ibtimes.co.uk) 5 July 2014). Thirty-nine cheetahs were confiscated by the UAE customs in 1998-2002, mainly originating from 'Somalia'. YouTube videos showing a captive cheetah on a leash in Hargeisa were circulated on 2 October 2009. Five cubs were confiscated in Hargeisa and sent to a rescue centre in Ethiopia ([www.bornfree.org.uk](http://www.bornfree.org.uk) 6 May 2012) and three more captive cubs were confiscated in 2015 and taken to the same rescue centre ([www.somalilandpress.com](http://www.somalilandpress.com) 01 May 2015). According to a CITES review of the illegal cheetah trade (Nowell 2015) over 40 cheetahs were confiscated in the Horn of Africa 2011-2013, most of them in Somaliland. It is not known how many of these cheetahs originated in Somaliland or were imported from Ethiopia or elsewhere.

### 4.3. Habitat degradation

About 36% of Somaliland has been degraded by loss of vegetation, gully erosion, loss of topsoil, and invasive plants (FAO-SWALIM 2008). M.M. Mirreh (former Director of the Range Training Institute in Burco) visited Aroori Plains in 2012 and reported that in 30 years, the habitat had in places become unrecognisable: perennial grasses were almost completely gone and trees and scrub were encroaching on the former grasslands: such a change would favour browsers such as Gerenuk and Lesser Kudu at the expense of gazelles and other grazers. A decline in rangeland quality and the disappearance of the most palatable perennial grasses due to overgrazing has been reported by several authors (e.g. Hemming (1998).



#### 4.4. Drought

Arid areas are always susceptible to variations in sparse rainfall. Somaliland experienced a severe drought in 2015 following failure of rainfall in two consecutive *gu* seasons, linked in part to El Niño. This drought has affected more than 240,000 people and killed 35%–40% of the livestock. ([www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/nov/25/somaliland-drought/](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/nov/25/somaliland-drought/) 25/11/2015). It is difficult to assess the effect on wild antelopes, though Simonetta (1988) noted that marked local decreases in Beira were caused by drought in 1975.

#### 4.5. Charcoal production

Charcoal is a traditional source of fuel, but after controls collapsed in 1990, the rate of production surged, as the population grew and to meet demand for exports. Sacks of charcoal are seen by the roadside awaiting transport almost everywhere and charcoal pits and cut and burned trees are common sights. FAO-SWALIM (2008) and Ibrahim (2011) reported uncontrolled cutting of *A. bussei* and excessive cutting of other trees for charcoal. A study by MOPD&E and Candlelight NGO (2004) showed that 65% of charcoal in Hargeisa and Berbera and 25% in Burco came from live trees; unsustainable utilization of tree resources for charcoal production had led to a significant depletion of acacia trees, e.g. in the last six months of 2003, 516,990 sacks of charcoal were produced, representing 323,118 trees of 70-90 cm, half of them probably live trees. The government has recently made attempts to control tree cutting and charcoal production. The negative effects on the environment and sustainability of forest resources are clear. As far as antelopes are concerned, reductions in the extent of woodland will impact on the species that rely on this habitat, especially Gerenuk and Lesser Kudu. *Acacia etbaica* trees also provide an important source of shade for Beira.



Fig. 15. Charcoal pits in the 'Beira Hills'. © D. Mallon/ASG.

#### 4.6. Invasive species

*Prosopis juliflora* or mesquite was planted in western Somaliland in around refugee camps following war between Ethiopia and Somalia to provide fuel and stabilise soil erosion; it is prolific and an aggressive invasive and since then it has colonised a lot of the coastal zone and western Somaliland (FAO-SWALIM 2008; Mirreh 2011). The Tog Wajaale Plains in the north-west on the Somaliland/Ethiopia border have been invaded by exotic weeds, notably *Parthenium hysterophorus* (Mills et al. 2015).



## 5. Conclusions

The results of the field trip and the ancillary information gathered are too sparse and too fragmentary to make estimates of antelope population sizes or trends or to draw many conclusions. In effect the results provide no more than a 'snapshot of the conservation landscape' but can at least serve as an indication of current status and a partial baseline for further studies.

Beisa Oryx, Hartebeest and Dibatag have all been extirpated from Somaliland. Comparing the current status of antelopes with descriptions made over a hundred years ago leaves no doubt that the abundance and distribution of all species, except for Salt's Dik-dik, have greatly declined in the past 130 years. For example, Pearce (1898) described '*huge herds of oryx mingling with even larger herds of aul [Soemmerring's Gazelle]*' and '*hundreds and hundreds of hartebeest*'. Herbert (1908) said "*..huge herds of buck were met on every march..*," and described Speke's Gazelle as "*very numerous*" and Soemmerring's Gazelle as "*..a very common gazelle in all open parts of the country..*".

Antelopes face several threats as enumerated above, though the current scope and severity of these are unquantified. There are some favourable factors, for example a general absence of village dogs which must have a positive effect on dik-diks especially, and other species: the only domestic dogs seen on the 2010 field trip consisted of a small feral pack at Hargeisa airport. The tradition of eating wild meat (mammals or birds fish) seems not to be well-developed and e.g. several species of bustards (Otididae) were seen regularly.

Daallo Forest is a reserve on paper but needs adequate funding and effective management. Developing a national protected area network is urgently needed to protect representative ecosystems and key species and is envisaged by the government: The Somaliland National Vision 2030 (MoN&PD 2011) contains five pillars including Pillar 5: Environmental Protection. This states that "*The government considers the national flora and fauna as invaluable assets which must be conserved and managed for current and future generations. It will establish national reserves and game parks to allow surviving species to flourish and even reintroduce extinct ones. The government will also enact and enforce anti-poaching laws. The local community will be at the centre of these conservation measures*".

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**Fig. 16. Pastoralists on the move. © A.A. Jama.**



**Fig. 17. Speke's Gazelles on Sarar Plains. © D. Mallon/ASG**



