

NOTES ON THE CURRENT STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF SOME LARGE MAMMALS IN ETHIOPIA

(EXCLUDING ERITREA)

by

Melvin BOLTON *

Après avoir décrit les différentes grandes zones climatiques d'Éthiopie et donné quelques précisions sur la végétation caractéristique de chacune, l'auteur analyse les facteurs qui peuvent influencer la répartition des grands mammifères de ces régions. Des notes brèves, portant sur près de 50 espèces de grands mammifères, sont réunies pour tenter d'établir quelle est, actuellement, en Éthiopie, leur répartition et leur statut.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been an encouraging number of investigations into the fauna of selected parts of Ethiopia. Yet there are still vast tracts of country from which no recent published records are available of even the most conspicuous large mammals which are present. Thus in Dorst and Dandelot (1970) the distribution of lion in Ethiopia is represented by a question mark.

Poor communications, rugged terrain and the enormous range of habitats represented serve to make Ethiopia a difficult, if fascinating country with which to become acquainted. Furthermore the wildlife situation, especially with regard to big game is very different from that which prevailed a few decades ago. On the whole, large mammals throughout the Empire have undergone a serious decline in numbers. The outlook is rendered less bleak with the recent introduction of new wildlife legislation and a start has been made on implementing ambitious plans for conservation. The problems in the way of progress, however, remain considerable.

These notes are based largely on the author's own field work over the past five years. They are far from comprehensive and there is no attempt to deal with taxonomic problems, since except in a very few instances there has been no opportunity to collect

* Imperial Ethiopian Government Wildlife Conservation Organisation, P.O. Box 386, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

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specimens. In general, only animals which could be positively identified in the field, at least to species level, have been considered for inclusion and a number of other species have been omitted where it was felt that recent records gave too little indication of present status and distribution. Nevertheless, it is hoped that they will help to clear up some areas of uncertainty.

To avoid repetition, place names mentioned in the text have been listed in a gazeteer which follows the notes. The province of Eritrea has had to be excluded as there has been no opportunity for travel in that province during the last few years.

ETHIOPIA :

PHYSICAL FEATURES AND THE MAJOR BIOTIC REGIONS

Ethiopia is a land of some 1,200,000sq km (460,000sq ml) lying between latitudes 4°00'N and 18°00'N. The country is roughly triangular in shape with the apex to the north. The centre of the triangle is occupied by a huge highland mass bisected SW-NE by the Main Ethiopian Rift which funnels out into the Afar Depression and extends, like the arms of a Y, as the valleys of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

East of the rift the highlands form the Eastern or Somali Plateau which dips gently south-eastwards to the Somali border and the coastal plains of the Indian Ocean. On the other side of the rift valley, the highlands of the Western Plateau generally fall steeply to the peripheral lowlands and reach their greatest development in the basalt mass of the Simien Mountains which presents a precipitous north face with sheer drops of over 2,000ft (600 m). The land thus ranges in elevation from about 380ft (116 m) below sea level in the Danakil Depression of Afar, to nearly 15,000ft (4,543 m) above sea level in the Simiens.

The pattern of rainfall (mainly orographic) is complex and the natural vegetation shows corresponding diversity. Very broadly, major biotic regions may be distinguished as follows : Northern and Eastern Lowlands, Southern Lowlands and Rift Valley, Western Lowlands, Highland Forest Zones, Afroalpine Meadows and Moorlands.

NORTHERN AND EASTERN LOWLANDS

These are the driest regions of Ethiopia. In the extreme north, over most of Afar and east of about 44°00'E, rainfall is irregular

Order PERISSODACTYLA

Family RHINOCEROTIDAE

Diceros bicornis (L.) — Black Rhinoceros.

A pair was recorded south of Mwi River in 1967 by G. H. Brown (Urban and Brown 1968). The only positive report since then was in June 1973 when fresh tracks were found also near the Mwi River (T. Tischler pers. comm.). Rhino is rumoured to occur in the Mago Valley.

Family EQUIDAE

Equus asinus somalicus (Sclater). — Somali Wild Ass.

Found only in Afar, the best concentrations are in central Afar from Lake Abbe westwards to the Awash River at about 10°40'N and northwards to about 12°10'N. H. Klingel conducted a wild ass survey within this area and estimated between two and three thousand head (*Oryx*, May 1972, p. 308). This is by no means the full extent of the range however and there are many unconfirmed reports of wild ass from as far south as 10°00'N. One has recently been seen a few miles east of Lake Hertale at 9°55'N. In the north a group of three was seen immediately south of Lake Julietta (Duckworth 1973) and in April 1973 six were seen within the Danakil Depression west of Dallol. Locals at Dallol reported that wild asses could be seen in small numbers north of Dallol along the road to Mersa Fatma.

Equus grevyi (Oustalet). — Grevy's Zebra.

This species occurs only in the south (east of the Omo River) and in the east. In the south it has been recorded in small numbers east of Murle and in the Mago Valley. In the Lake Stefanie Rift, where 70 were counted in a day during July 1969, it can be seen from the Kenya border northwards to Arbore.

Grevy's zebra is apparently absent from Borana but probably still survives in very small numbers in Bale province (tracks seen near Imi). It is strongly rumoured to occur in south Ogaden around Mustayel but there are no confirmed records.

In Afar there are several hundred on the Alledoghi Plains and a tiny herd in the proposed Awash National Park. Grevy's zebra is said to occur north of Sardo but none has been seen during several recent safaris.

Equus burchelli (Gray). — Burchell's zebra.

Unlike *E. grevyi* Burchell's zebra is found on both sides of the Omo River. On the west bank it occurs in the Mwi River area where nearly 500 were counted in 1965 (Urban & Brown 1968) and 102 were seen in Feb. 1973.

It is rumoured to occur sporadically along the Akobo River to the Gambella salient and there are certainly seasonal movements away from the Mwi River, possibly across the Sudan border.

East of the Omo small numbers have been seen in the Mago Valley and on the plains between the Mago and Omo Rivers. It is said to occur, together with *E. grevyi* in the Lake Stefanie Rift but no recent, positive records are available. One herd was seen in the Sagan River Valley in approx 5°15'N 37°45'E (M. J. Makin pers. comm.). About 500 head are resident further north at Nachisar and there are small numbers in open savanna near Yavello

Order ARTIODACTYLA

Family HIPPOPOTAMIDAE

Hippopotamus amphibius (L.). — Hippopotamus.

Quite widespread and not uncommon, occurring in Lake Tana in the north and along the Blue Nile at least as far west as Didessa (Corbet & Yalden 1972). In the west it is present in the Dabus River basin and in the lower reaches of the Baro, Gilo and Akobo Rivers. It also occurs in a number of lakes and swamps within the Gambella salient. In the Omo, five were seen near the Mago confluence.

Within the rift it occurs in lakes Chamo, Abaya, Awassa (few) Langanano (few) and Zwai. Seventy were counted in a small pool at Hosanna.

In the Awash River it is quite common above the Koka dam downstream to Lake Hertale and has been recorded as far downstream as Lake Assaita (Duckworth 1973).

In the south-east a solitary individual was seen in the Webe Shebelle a few miles east of Gode in 1972 (Hukku 1973).

Family SUIDAE

Potamochoerus porcus (L.). — Bush Pig.

Sightings and positive records are scarce but evidence of pigs, presumably this species, can be found in the mountains of Bale and Arussi up to about 11,000ft (3,400 m). Bushpig has been