

# 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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### 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 this is a widely 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 Tuyo (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

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





(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 ' A si

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*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.

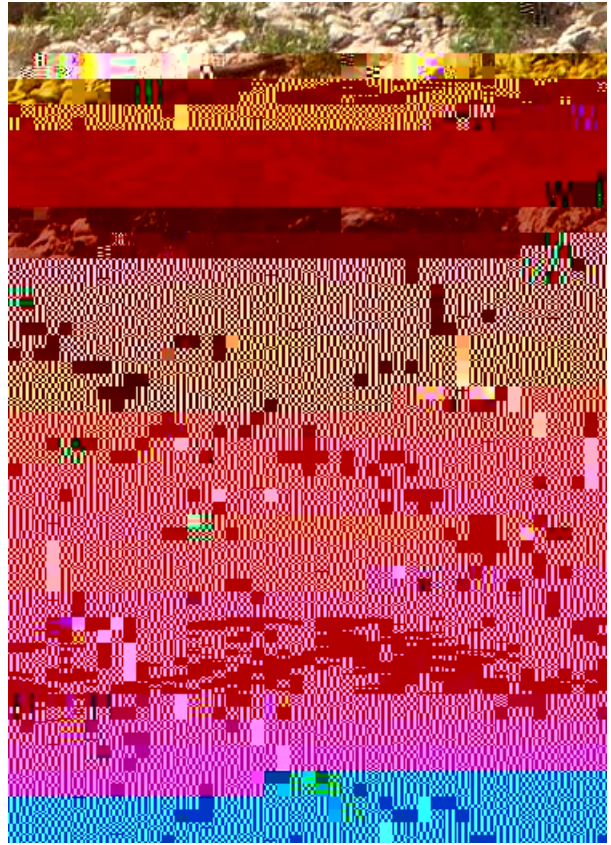
(Somali: *baira*)

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

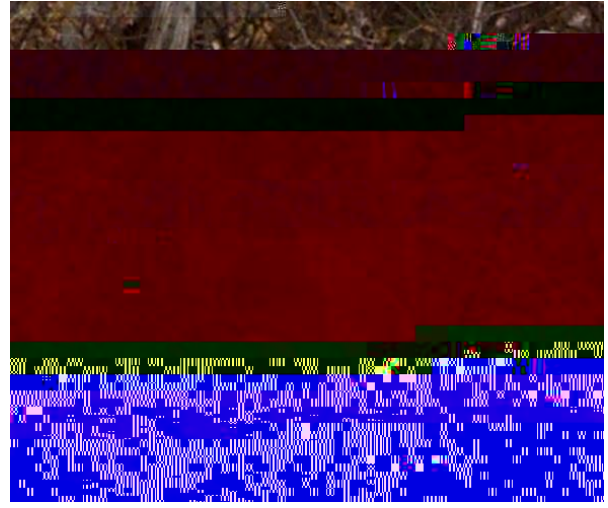
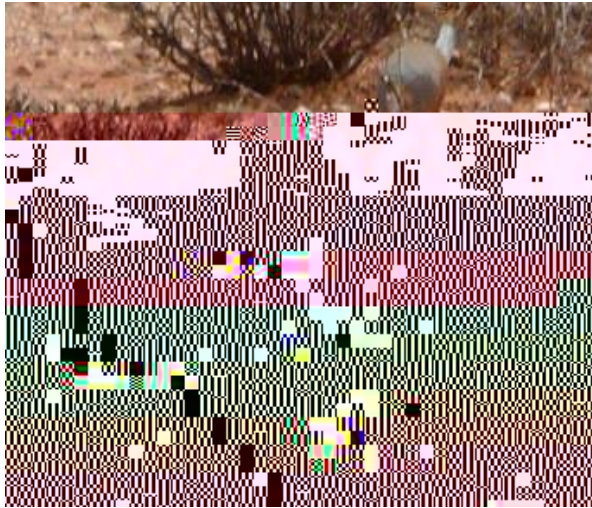
In Somaliland recent records have been obtained from several sites on the plateau and in the main mountain range. Beira have been regularly observed in the 'Beira Hills' east of Hargeisa. On the 2010 field trip Beira were seen at five

(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.



(Somali:



(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 (1978) showed it as (Si)15(m)-4(o)-5(n)3(e)9(tt)-3(a)12( )JTJETQq0.000008871 0 595.32 841.9





(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.

(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).

*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.

*Equus africanus* (Somali: *gumburi*)

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



*Panthera leo* (Somali: *libaah*)

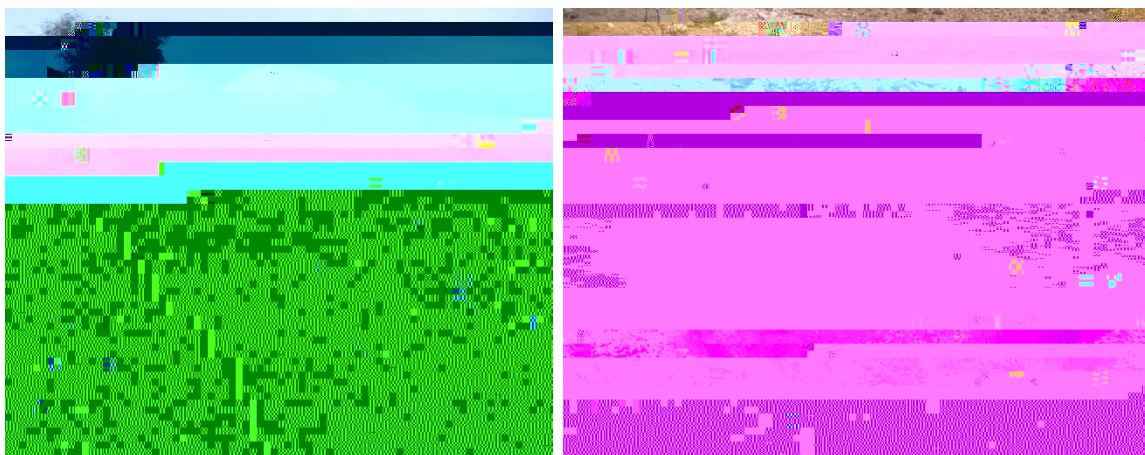
Lions were once widespread in Somaliland but according to Drake-Brockman (1910) '*now seldom seen far distant from the Haud and Nogaal Valley* (i.e. only in remote areas) and he described them as comparatively rare, but occasionally wandering to the Golis range. However, Hunt (1951) said Lions were quite 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.



The available data are descriptive and/or

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.

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.



*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* (

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.



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