

PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE MAMMAL FAUNA OF THE MKUZI GAME RESERVE

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INTRODUCTION

The mammal populations of some of our game and nature reserves both in Natal and Zululand are still imperfectly known. Situated in the Eastern littoral of North Zululand the Mkuzi Game Reserve is certainly no exception. Although far from complete the following brief notes are presented with the hope that they will stimulate others to more detailed local research into both protected and unprotected mammals.

For the sake of completeness, what is known on the former abundance and distribution, of the now scarce or extinct mammal species of this area has been included in the notes section. Most of this information has been gleaned from old residents of the area, in particular Mr. L. C. Denyer, Game guards Konjwayo Ndlovu, Msalela Myeni, and Funwayo Mlambo.

Exploratory trapping and collecting of small mammal specimens was undertaken and all notes were collected during the period from May, 1960 to December, 1962.

The continued help and advice of the following persons is acknowledged with grateful thanks; Colonel J. Vincent, Director of Nature Conservation, Natal, for making available numerous items of equipment for various investigations and also for continued encouragement in many fields, Dr. J. A. Pringle, Director of Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, for continued interest shown in the collecting and identification of specimens; Doctors R. du Toit, G. Theiler, R. J. Ortlepp, and technical staff of the Research Laboratory at Onderstepoort for the examination and identification of parasite samples; Dr. A. C. van Bruggen, Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg, for the examination of various mammal stomach content samples. The help rendered by the following Natal Parks Board officers is also much appreciated, C. J. Ward, H. B. Potter, I. C. Player, L. C. Denyer and R. D. Gush.

GENERAL NOTES

As already stated, trapping and collecting on only a limited scale were undertaken in various habitat localities throughout the game reserve. Some important facts have, however, been brought to light, and one of the most interesting is the decided lack of numbers amongst the rodent and shrew population.

One occasion comes to mind when over fifty traps set amongst rank vegetation on the Mkuzi River bank failed to secure a single specimen over a period of some fifty-six hours.

It is true that a large, if not excessive, population of Black-backed Jackal and other smaller Carnivora exist within the reserve.

This, plus the generally denuded condition of large areas of the reserve from overgrazing, trampling out by game animals, and other related factors, could well be a major contributory cause for the scarcity of numbers amongst the smaller terrestrial mammals. This matter is however, to be further investigated, and it is hoped to discuss the subject in more detail at some later stage.

In common with many parts of South Africa, the Mkuzi Game Reserve suffers an acute shortage of surface water. During dry periods the reserve, in extent some 62,000 acres, contains only two stable surface waterpoints for game drinking purposes. With each passing year the flow of the already unstable Mkuzi River becomes less in volume, the whole position being made worse by the increased agricultural development upstream.

The existing network of seasonal water-retaining surface depressions (pans) become shallower each year as they slowly silt up from a number of related factors, of which some of the more important are tabulated hereunder: (i) The shortage of moisture retaining, soil binding vegetation, (ii) Top soil which is broken up and loosened by the trampling of concentrations of game mammals, and (iii) Violent rain storms of short duration which wash the surrounding top-soil into the depressions.

During periods of prolonged drought there is a definite movement of game animals from the game reserve, on to the adjoining state owned lands, in search of water. The proposed irrigation development of the Makatini state lands to the North of the Mkuzi River will only complicate the matter unless more waterpoints are supplied.

Illegal poaching and snaring, although of little concern to the commoner game types, most certainly have a deleterious effect on the rarer species like the Black Rhino, Suni and Mountain Reed-buck.

Where possible, numerical estimates of game population have been included. These figures represent the minimum numbers thought to exist within the game reserve as at July 31st, 1962.

SPECIES NOTES

Petrodromus tetradactylus Peters.

Elephant Shrew; Bosklaasneus; Igqulu, Ntsontsonunu.

General Notes.

Although seldom seen, by no means uncommon; in fact quite plentiful in some areas of the game reserve and Makatini state lands. Favours the riverine forests along the Mkuzi River and has patchy runways through the vegetation. It is very active during the early morning.

Crocidura russula silacea Thomas.

Grey Musk Shrew; Skeerbekmuis.

General Notes.

A few specimens trapped in rank vegetation along the Mkuze floodplain. Not often encountered.

General Notes.

Uncommon, seldom seen, frequents the densely bushed areas of the game reserve. During the period under review two of these rare cats were found dead in wire noose snares. The continued survival of this species is by no means assured. (Est. park popu. 1962, 10).

Panthera leo Linnaeus.

Lion; Leeu.

General Notes.

No resident population, a few wandering animals visit the reserve from time to time. Last seen during 1958.

Acinonyx jubatus Schreber.

Cheetah; Jagluiperd; Nqululu, Ndlohla, Ntsikane.

General Notes.

In former times not uncommon this species is now extinct in the area. Mr. Denyer informs me that the last animal seen inside the reserve was noted near the Bube pans during 1941. An unconfirmed report that an animal seen roaming the Makatini flats during 1955.

Orycteropus afer Pallas.

Antbear; Aardvark; Isambane.

General Notes.

Found in suitable areas throughout the game reserve and adjoining state lands where it is not uncommon. Although subterranean and nocturnal in habits it is sometimes seen abroad during daylight hours. Regarded by local Africans as a delicacy.

Loxodonta africana Blumenbach.

African Elephant; Olifant; Indhlovu.

General Notes.

No resident population within the game reserve. A small number of these animals are still to be found in Zululand north of the Pongolo River. Sometimes wander south to the Mkuzi Game Reserve but not over the past five years.

Diceros bicornis Linnaeus.

Black Rhino; Swartrenoster.

General Notes.

Found throughout the low lying areas of the game reserve. A few animals still live in the Pondo bush on the Makatini state lands. Actual population a matter of some local argument but probably between 25 and 35 head.

Ceratotherium simum Burchell.

Square-lipped Rhino; Witrenoster.

General Notes.

Resident population of reserve consists of two head introduced from the Umfolozi Game Reserve.

Equus burchelli Gray.

Burchell's Zebra; Bontkwagga; Idube.

General Notes.

A few small herds (between 5 and 8 head) scattered throughout the low lying areas of the reserve. (Popl. 1962 estimate: 100). Judging by the large number of calves and immature animals seen the population would appear to be on the increase.

Potamochoerus porcus Linnaeus.

Bush-Pig; Bosvark; Ngulube.

General Notes.

Although mainly nocturnal not infrequently seen abroad during daylight hours here at Mkuzi. Seldom snared by poachers. (Est. 1962 popl.: 1,000).

Phacochoerus aethiopicus Pallas.

Warthog; Vlakvark; Intebane, Ndlovudawana.

General Notes.

Occurs throughout the game reserve and is still found in small numbers on the adjacent state lands as well as a few farms in the area. (Est. 1962 park popl.: 4,000). Usually heavily infested with various ectoparasites, ticks of the following types being recorded from specimens secured here at Mkuzi: *Amblyomma hebraeum*, *Rhipicephalus appendiculatus*, *Rhipicephalus maculatus*. The flea *Echidnophaga larina* was found on nearly all warthogs examined. The nematode *Murshidia lamata* not infrequently removed from the intestines.

Hippopotamus amphibius Linnaeus.

Hippo; Seekoei; Invubu, Imboma?

General Notes.

No resident population; the few animals that visit the reserve seldom stay for long.

Cephalophus natalensis A. Smith.

Red Duiker; Rooiduiker; Umkumbi.

General Notes.

Numerous throughout most of the reserve. Often seen in riverine forest along the Mkuzi River. (Est. 1962 popl.: 2,000). Feeds mainly on fallen wild fruit, leaves, and the like.

Cephalophus monticola Thunberg.

Blue Duiker; Bloubokkie; Ipti.

General Notes.

Does not occur in the Mkuzi Game Reserve but reported to still exist in the 'Mdagene' bush west of the Ubombo police station. (July, 1962).

Sylvicapra grimmia Linnaeus.

Grey Duiker; Gewone Duiker; Mpunzi.