

# Preliminary notes on the mammals of the Namib Desert Park

by

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## Order TUBULIDENTATA

## Family Orycteropodidae (Antbears).

*Orycteropus afer albicaudus* (Rothschild) Antbear.

*O. a. albicaudus* is the recognised subspecies occurring in South West Africa.

This species is fairly widespread in the eastern areas of the Park; especially in the Ganab, Tinkas Flats and the thornveld regions of the north-east. Most of the records are of fresh tracks and burrow activity, however three definite sight records exist. One animal was seen in the Tinkas Flats area moving around during the early afternoon, shortly after torrential rains, (January, 1974), while the other two animals were observed at Arachadmab. As stated by Coetzee (1969) their distribution is probably dependant on termite populations.

## Order HYRACOIDEAE

## Family Procaviidae (Dassies)

*Procavia capensis* (Pallas) Cape Dassie.

Restricted to the rocky areas of the Park, the most westerly record is of a small temporary colony in the Kuiseb River at approximately 15° 05' E. Below Huduob in the Kuiseb River, the colonies seem to move about considerably; however above this point the groups seem to be more stable. All colonies encountered seem to be small. *P. capensis* also occurs along the course of the Swakop River and on the rocky outcrops of the north-east. Animals have also been recorded at the Tumasberg, Amichab, Heinrichsberg, Langer Heinrich and Anachankirab.

Coetzee (1969) notes that this species was numerous in certain outcrops the year following good rains, however after two years the animals had completely disappeared. The author has noted large deposits of faeces of this species in two localities where there were no signs of recent activity.

## Order PERISSODACTYLA

## Family Rhinocerotidae (Rhinoceros)

*Diceros bicornis* (Linnaeus) Black Rhinoceros.

Alexander (1838) records the following for this species in the Kuiseb River; 'The remains of a dead rhinoceros were found near us, which seemed to have been surprised by the sudden rising of the river and drowned.' The brothers' Van Reenen and Pieter Pienaar explored and hunted in the Swakop River in 1791, or thereabouts, and came across large numbers of elephant and rhinoceros (in Levinson, 1961). Coetzee (1969) records B. de la Bat as having informed him of a well preserved rhinoceros horn that was excavated near Tinkas water-hole. This species used to occur naturally, along the courses of the Kuiseb and Swakop Rivers; it has since been re-introduced to the Kuiseb River.

## Family Equidae (Zebras)

*Equus zebra hartmannae* (Matchie) Hartmann's Mountain zebra.

Zebra are found in most of the available habitats, especially the rocky hills, the open plains, and the

Kuiseb and Swakop Canyons. *E. z. hartmannae* has also been observed in the inter-dune valleys to the south of the Kuiseb River. This species seems to be subject to a certain amount of local movement; now partially restricted by the boundary fences. The population of this species in the Namib Desert Park is estimated at approximately one thousand animals by Joubert (1972).

## Order ARTIODACTYLA

## Family Suidae (Pigs)

*Phacochoeros aethiopicus shortridgei* (St. Ledger) Warthog.

Ellermann (1953) and Haltenorth (1963) recognise *shortridgei* for South West Africa.

This species seems to be restricted to the Kuiseb and Swakop Rivers and to the thornveld regions of the north-east. It is nowhere common and has only been observed running singly and in pairs.

## Family Bovidae (Antelopes, Buffalo)

*Raphicerus campestris* (Zukowsky) Steenbok.

In South West Africa this species is generally recognised as *R. c. steinhardtii*.

This antelope occurs in both the Swakop and Kuiseb Rivers but is especially common in the latter. They also seem to be fairly common in parts of the north-east, and have been recorded from Anachankirab, Zebra Pan, Tumasberg, Ganab, Arachadmab and Groot Tinkas.

*Oreotragus oreotragus* (Zimmermann) Klipspringer.

This species is confined to rocky outcrops and to the Kuiseb and Swakop Canyons. Klipspringer are often encountered in the scattered rocky hills situated out on the gravel plains, but these animals are probably subject to a certain amount of local movement. The most westerly record for this species is 15° 06' E in the Kuiseb River. It is most commonly encountered in the Kuiseb where it leaves the canyon walls to feed on the riverine vegetation. They are usually observed in groups of two to four animals.

*Antidorcas marsupialis* (Zimmermann) Springbok.

Recognised as *A. m. angolensis* Blaine, in South West Africa, this species is fairly widespread in the Park especially in the eastern areas. Herds of more than fifteen animals have not been observed west of Anachankirab but smaller groups and single animals have been noted as far west as the Hamilton Range.

It is very possible that occasionally animals move as far as Sandwich Harbour. The larger herds are usually observed in the Ganab, Hotsas and Tinkas Flats areas, although groups of up to seventy animals have been noted in the Anachankirab and Zebra Pan regions. Two rams have been seen twelve miles south of the Kuiseb River in one of the dune-valleys. The author estimates the present springbok population in the Park to be between 1 500—2 000 individuals.

*Oryx gazelle* (Linnaeus) Gemsbok.

This species is widely distributed in the Park, moving about a great deal. During the dry season fairly large numbers are to be seen in the Kuiseb River area and on the plains to the east of Anachankirab, at the onset of the rains they tend to disperse. Most groups number between five and thirty animals, however one herd of one hundred and eighty-three individuals were observed at Arachadmab. Lone animals are frequently encountered throughout the area. The author estimates the gemsbok population at approximately 2 000—2 500 animals.

*Tragelaphus strepsiceros* (Pallas) Kudu.

This large antelope is restricted to the two main water courses and the eastern thornveld regions. The majority of the population is situated to the east of 15° 25' E. Animals have been recorded at Blutkoppie and Groot Tinkas. Van der Spuy (1962) states that kudu occur in the following habitat types in the Namib; Namib sand-dune veld, Namib rubbleveld and the Namib Desert margin. It is unlikely that there is a permanent kudu population in the first mentioned habitat in the Namib Desert Park; animals may move into the area following fresh vegetation growth. It is nowhere common and the population is probably in the vicinity of one hundred individuals. However, kudu are subject to a great deal of local movement and it is difficult to give an accurate estimate of numbers.

## Order LAGOMORPHA

## Family Leporidae (Hares)

*Lepus capensis* (Linnaeus) Cape Hare.

*L. c. narranus* Thomas is still a recognised form for the Namib Desert and its original distribution was given as the Namib Desert by Roberts (1951). Specimens were described from Rooibank in the Kuiseb (type), Swakopmund, Karub and Okombahe on the Omaruru River. This is a very pale form and is probably the subspecies found in the Namib Desert Park as a whole.

This species is found commonly on the open gravel plains and in the thornveld regions of the north-east; in addition to Coetzee's (1969) locality records they have been found to be fairly plentiful in the sand-dune areas south of the Kuiseb River. Shortridge (1938) gives the distribution of *L. c. narranus* as being 'the low scrub in the beds of sand rivers in the Namib Desert'. He also states that *L. capensis* avoids hills and the narrow inter-hill valleys. However, this species has been observed in the small inter-hill valleys in the north-east.

*Pronolagus crassicaudatus* (I. Geoffrey) Red Rock Hare.

The subspecific status of this species is at present uncertain. Restricted to the hills and rocky outcrops of the Park, it is probably more widespread than present records indicate. *P. crassicaudatus* seems to be fairly common in parts of the Kuiseb Canyon and also in the rocky areas of the northeast.

## Order RODENTIA

## Family Hystricidae (Porcupine)

*Hystrix africaeaustralis* (Peters) Porcupine.

A not uncommon species in the Park but one that is infrequently encountered. The most westerly record for this species in the Park is at 22° 48' S; 14° 46' E. This species is present in both the main water courses, the north-eastern areas and some of the granite outcrops on the gravel plains. Quills and tracks are often the only indication of their presence.

## Family Petromyidae (Rock Rats)

*Petromus typicus* (A. Smith) Rock Rat.

There are a number of forms described for this species in the Namib Desert but it is unlikely that these are all valid. This is a common animal in the rocky areas of the Park and it is often encountered.

## Family Sciuridae (Squirrels)

*Xerus inauris* (Zimmermann) Ground Squirrel.

A common species of the plains and the inter-hill valleys but has also been observed in the rocky areas of the north-east on a number of occasions. So far it has not been found west of 15° 20' E. *X. inauris* is subject to a great deal of local movement and this is especially noticeable in the Ganab area. During and, for several months, after the rainy season large numbers of this species move out onto the open plains, but as the vegetation begins to die off they move back into the inter-hill valleys. Most of the colonies on the plains seem to number from between five and fifteen animals whereas those occurring in the rocky hills rarely number more than five individuals.

## Family Pedetidae (Spring Hares)

*Pedetes capensis damarensis* (Roberts) Spring Hare.

The subspecies *damarensis* is recognised for Damaraland. At present there are only three records of this species in the Park; one from the Ganab area, a second from the sandy/thornveld of the north-east while the third animal was observed in the Anachankirab area (E. Robinson, pers. comm.). The animals were all observed in the vicinity of wide, sandy washes.

## Family Muscardinidae (Dormouse)

*Graphiurus platyops* (Thomas) Rock Dormouse.

Thus far there are only two records of this species in the Park; one animal was collected in the Anachankirab range and the skeletal remains of another specimen were discovered at Heinrichsberg. Both records were taken in very broken granite slides. This species probably occurs throughout the rocky areas of the Namib Desert Park. Coetzee (1969) does not include this species in his list of the mammals of the Namib Desert.

## Family Muridae (Rats and Mice)

*Aethomys namaquensis* (A. Smith) Namaqua Rock Rat.

Two subspecies are present in the Usakos District close to the northern boundary of the Namib Desert Park. They are *A. n. siccatus* and *A. n. namibensis*; although the subspecific status of animals occurring in the Park is uncertain. Meester (1963) considers *A. n. namibensis* to be a synonym of *A. n. siccatus*.

This species appears to be fairly common in areas of suitable habitat, that is rocky hillsides. It has not been collected west of 15° 30' E.

*Thallomys paedulus* (de Winton) Black-tailed Tree Rat.

Roberts (1951) gives the distribution of *T. p. damarensis* (*T. damarensis damarensis*) as the western edge of Damaraland, bordering the Namib. As noted by Coetzee (1969), this species seems to be restricted to *Acacia giraffae* trees in the Namib. To date this rodent has only been found in the Kuiseb River but is probably to be found in the Swakop River and also the larger washes that are well wooded. The untidy nests of this species are quite easily spotted, and are especially common between Gobabeb and Huduob.

*Rhabdomys pumilio* (Sparman) Four-striped Mouse.

The subspecific status of this species is still uncertain, however in the Namib Desert Park the following are known: *R. p. bechuanae*, *R. p. namibensis* and *R. p. namaquensis*. The original collection areas are Rooibank on the Kuiseb River, Swakopmund and Gobabeb respectively.

*Rhabdomys pumilio* occurs widely in the Park and has been found in all the major water courses, the northern fringe of the sand-dune area (amongst *Acanthosicyos horrida*), as well as in some of the grass/thornveld areas of the north-east.

*Petromyscus collinus* (Thomas and Hinton) Pygmy Rock Mouse.

Roberts recognised a sub-species for the Namib, namely *namibensis*. However, as with most other rodents, the subspecific status is uncertain and in need of revision.

The Pygmy Rock Mouse is common in the rocky areas of the Park and occurs in practically all areas where there is suitable habitat. They have been caught as far west as 14° 50' E, while they appear to be more numerous to the east of 15° 15' E.

*Desmodillus auricularis* (A. Smith) Namaqua Gerbil.

This species occurs widely on the gravel plains as well as in the grassveld regions of the north-east. Specimens have also been recorded in the Kuiseb and Swakop Rivers.

*Gerbillus paebe* (A. Smith) Lesser Gerbil.

This species is fairly widespread but seems to be most abundant in the coastal sand-dunes at Sandwich Harbour, the dune area south of the Kuiseb and on the gravel plains in the vicinity of Gobabeb.

*Gerbillus vullinus* (Thomas) Brush-tailed Gerbil.

Coetzee (1969) records this species as occurring in the sand-dunes as well as on the gravel plains in the Namib. It is most frequently encountered on the gravel plains in the Anachankirab area.

*Gerbillus setzeri* Schlitter.

This is a new species recently described by Schlitter (1972), and animals of this species were collected from the following areas within the Park; Gobabeb, Swartbank, Tumasberg and Hope Mine.

*Gerbillus tytonis* (Bauer and Niethammer).

Bauer and Niethammer (1959) originally described this animal as a sub-species of *G. vullinus*, however Davis (1968) has raised it to specific status. The only specimens known to the author are those collected in the sand-dunes at Gobabeb.

The exotics *Mus musculus* and *Rattus rattus* have both been recorded from Sandwich Harbour.

## Order CETACIA

### Family Delphinidae (Dolphins)

The two members of this family recorded at Sandwich Harbour were identified from skeletal material found on sand-banks.

They are *Delphinus delphis* (Linnaeus), European Dolphin and *Cephalorhynchus heavisidei* (Gray), Heaviside's Dolphin.

## SUMMARY

The distribution of the mammalian fauna of the Namib Desert Park is considered. Distribution data and habitat information are given and selected taxonomic notes are included. The distribution data is presented on maps of the Park.

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