



UNION INTERNATIONALE POUR LA CONSERVATION DE LA NATURE ET DE SES RESSOURCES  
INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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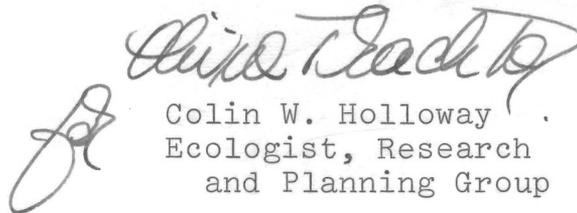
24 June 1974

Dear Dr. Verschuren,

I am in the process of revising the Red Data sheet for the lechwe Kobus leche; a copy of the current draft of the revision is enclosed. I would be extremely grateful if you could provide me with information on the present status of the species in Zaïre. Please do not hesitate to reply in French.

Your help would be very greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

  
Colin W. Holloway  
Ecologist, Research  
and Planning Group

Encls.

CWH/ot/1

## LECHWE

Kobus leche Gray, 1850

Order ARTIODACTYL A

Family BOVIDAE

STATUS Vulnerable. Depleted and continuing to decrease in numbers. The species is not yet in danger of extinction but its future will depend on protection of the swampy habitat in which it exists and on careful management. Three races are recognized: the red lechwe K. l. leche (Gray, 1850); black lechwe K. l. smithemani (Lydekker, 1900); and the Kafue lechwe K. l. kafuensis (Haltenorth, 1963). Of these the red lechwe is the most widespread and presumably most abundant, whereas the black lechwe has been most seriously depleted.

DISTRIBUTION From northern South West Africa and Botswana, the Caprivi Strip, southeastern Angola and Zambia into southern Zaire. Within this range the black lechwe was confined to the vicinity of the Bangweulu Swamp and the Chambesi river in Zambia, perhaps also extending to Lake Mweru, whereas the Kafue lechwe was found along the flats of the Kafue river and perhaps the Lukanga river. (1;4;7)  
Red lechwe: Angola: Only reports prior to 1932 available which indicate it occurs along the Cubango, Cuito and Longa rivers, draining into Okavango Swamp. Botswana: Okavango Swamp including the Moremi Game Reserve, also in the Chobe National Park. South West Africa: In the Okavango and Chobe areas of the Caprivi Strip. Zambia: Busanga plains north of Kafue National Park. Perhaps scattered populations remain in other wet areas. Zaire: No data. Black lechwe: Confined to Bangweulu Swamp in Zambia. Kafue lechwe: Restricted to the Kafue flats in Zambia. (1;2;4;5;8)

POPULATION All sub-species have undergone marked declines in population, attributed in part to uncontrolled market hunting and subsistence hunting and in part to a decrease in habitat. Red lechwe: still reasonably abundant in the Okavango and Chobe areas but drastically reduced in the Caprivi Strip. Ansell (1960) reported for Zambia 250 lechwe in the Busanga and Masozhi areas; 150 on the Luswishi river, 500 on Chisenga Island, 1,000 on the Simaraha flats and unknown numbers elsewhere. In 1966, however, no lechwe were seen on Chisenga Island, but 600 were observed in the Lukanga Swamp. By 1971 the Busanga flats populations had increased to 1,500 but no other estimates of numbers for Zambia were available. The situation in Angola and Zaire is not known. Black lechwe: Bell and Grimsdell (1973) have reviewed the decline of the black lechwe populations from roughly 600,000 in 1922-24 (even following the slaughter of the First World War) to approximately 16,000 in 1971, (their estimate being based on a series of total aerial censuses since 1969). They conclude that peripheral sections of the population are still declining at an appreciable rate. Kafue lechwe: Bell et al. (1973) have similarly reviewed the history of the Kafue lechwe populations. They estimate present populations to be 93,975 ( $\pm$  9.1%) based on aerial stratified sampling in 1970-72, and conclude that earlier populations have not greatly exceeded the present total, although the range has been much reduced. Red and black lechwe populations, however, have undoubtedly been reduced by overhunting. (1;2;3;5)

HABITAT "Closely confined to inundated floodplain and shallow water areas on the fringes of swamp or rivers and narrowly on the adjoining dry floodplains". This habitat is destroyed by flooding (e.g. construction of dams and reservoirs), or damaged by prolonged drought or the disappearance of permanent streams as a result of land abuse. All of these factors operate throughout its range. In Botswana, drying up of previously wet areas has seriously restricted the range of the red lechwe. The black lechwe are well below the carrying capacity of their range as a result of uncontrolled hunting; the Kafue lechwe populations, on the other hand, appear to be limited by food availability at the height of the floods and show signs of extreme nutritional stress during these periods. On the Kafue flats, some 250,000 cattle compete for grazing in the dry season (July-December)

and the flooding regime has been subjected to interference by two hydro-electric dams, one at the outlet to the flood plain (Kafue Gorge, completed in 1971) and one at the inlet (Iteshi-Teshi, to be completed in 1982). When both are in operation the water regime of the flats will be completely controlled and will reduce the area of optimum low flood grazing. (2;3;8)

CONSERVATION MEASURES TAKEN In theory, this species is protected from unrestricted hunting throughout its range. In practice, this protection is difficult to enforce. The black lechwe has had total protection since 1945. The red lechwe is well protected in Chobe National Park and the Moremi Game Reserve of Botswana and in the Busanga area of Kafue National Park. The Kafue lechwe is now protected in two new Zambian national parks which contain half the present population.

CONSERVATION MEASURES PROPOSED More effective game law enforcement, better land management to maintain stream flow, and protection of the major areas of lechwe habitat from development. For the black lechwe, a management plan has now been prepared for the Bangweulu area. A new National Park (to include the main wet season concentration areas of lechwe) strictly controlled sport hunting in the Bangweulu Game Management Area, protection of the Bangweulu catchment and increases in anti-poaching operations have all been recommended. The black lechwe populations should not be cropped until they reach 100,000.(2)

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