

On the status of Artiodactyles in the Republic of Yemen

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Abstract: The Yemen fauna comprises six artiodactyle species, two of which are extinct viz. *Oryx leucoryx* and *Gazella bilkis*; two more species (*Gazella dorcas saudiya* and *G. subgutturosa*) are probably extinct, or on the brink of extinction. *Gazella gazella cora* and *Capra ibex nubiana* have become very rare and need immediate protection. Further studies are necessary to clarify the current status of these species. The urgent conservation priorities of Yemen include the establishment of protected areas, captive breeding sites and re-introduction measures.

Kurzfassung: Die jemenitische Fauna umfasst sechs Arten von Paarhufern (Artiodactyla), von denen aber zwei, nämlich die Arabische Oryx-Gazelle (*Oryx leucoryx*) und die Bilkis-Gazelle (*Gazella bilkis*), bereits ausgestorben sind. Zwei weitere Arten, nämlich die Dorkasgazelle (*Gazella dorcas saudiya*) und die Kropfgazelle (*G. subgutturosa*) sind wahrscheinlich ebenfalls ausgestorben. Die Echtgazelle (*Gazella gazella cora*) und der Ibez (*Capra ibex nubiana*) sind sehr selten und benötigen dringend Schutzmaßnahmen. Weitere Studien sind notwendig, um den Status dieser Arten zu bestimmen. Zu den dringend notwendigen Schutzmaßnahmen zählen die Einrichtung von Schutz- und Nachzuchtgebieten sowie Wiederansiedlungsmaßnahmen.

Key words: Status, artiodactyles, gazelles, occurrence, distribution, Yemen.

Introduction

Yemen is characterized by high mountains, which act as cloud traps extracting moisture from rising air. The mountains are deeply incised by many wadis that drain to the west, east and south. Moreover, there are many natural ponds, springs and brooks. This creates an abundance of vegetation and harbours a rich wildlife unique to the Arabian peninsula, with many true endemic species. The position of the country in the far west of Asia and close to the Palearctic and Afrotropical realms has ensured a mixing of animal and plant elements, and its isolation has promoted the development of numerous endemic faunal and floral species. Unfortunately, Yemen's biodiversity is being drastically reduced by habitat degradation (AL-HUBAISHI & MÜLLER-HOHENSTEIN 1984, RANDS 1992, AL-SAFADI 1992, 1995–1999).

Our present knowledge of the mammalian fauna of the Yemen is based on a few scattered sources, including THOMAS (1900), NEUMANN (1906), BURY (1915), POCKOCK (1935), MORRISON-SCOTT (1939), SCOTT (1942), and SANBORN & HOOGSTRAAL (1953). The most comprehensive review of Arabian mammals, including the Yemen, is by HARRISON & BATES (1991). More recently, information on the Yemen artiodactyles has been given by NADER (1990) and GROVES (1996). Of the nine artiodactyle species known from Arabia, only six have been recorded from the Yemen. The status of the Lesser Kudu, *Tragelaphus imberbis*,