

On the distribution and status of the Arabian Tahr, *Hemitragus jayakari*, in the United Arab Emirates and northern Oman

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Abstract. Recent sightings of *Hemitragus jayakari* from the United Arab Emirates and northern Sultanate of Oman have confirmed this ungulate's existence in the area. The exact status of the UAE Arabian Tahr population is unknown, although possibly on the verge of extinction.

Kurzfassung. Die Existenz des Arabischen Tahrs *Hemitragus jayakari* in den Vereinigten Arabischen Emiraten und im nördlichen Oman wird durch Sichtbeobachtungen aus neuerer Zeit bestätigt. Diese Wildziegenart befindet sich in diesem Gebiet offenbar am Rande des Aussterbens. Der genaue Status der Population ist jedoch unbekannt.

Key words. Arabian Tahr, United Arab Emirates, Middle East, ungulates, distribution, status.

Introduction

The Arabian Tahr, *Hemitragus jayakari* (Thomas, 1894), is endemic to the Arabian Peninsula (FISHER 1999, HARRISON & BATES 1991, INSALL 1999, STUART & STUART 1998). It was first discovered in 1894 and named by Oldfield Thomas in honour of Surgeon Lieutenant Colonel A. S. G. Jayakar (HARRISON 1983). This rarely encountered ungulate occurs naturally in mountainous terrain throughout the eastern United Arab Emirates and northern Oman, from the Musandam in the north to the mountains bordering the Wahiba Sands in the south (HARRISON 1983, INSALL 1999, KINGDON 1991, MUNTON 1978, NADER 1990). According to MUNTON (1978 & 1985) the Tahr world population did not exceed 2000 individuals in 1978 while DICKINSON et al. (1983) suggested less than 20 for the UAE in 1980. Confirmed sightings from the UAE are infrequent and the species is classified as "critically endangered" (i.e. "facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future") in the UAE by HORNBY (1996). Its status as determined by the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN is EN/C2a i.e. endangered with a population estimate of <2500 mature individuals and inferred continuing decline in severely fragmented populations (FISHER 1999). This paper summarizes the present knowledge of this species from the UAE and northern Oman through past and recently confirmed sightings.

Distribution and status

A recent flurry of Arabian Tahr sightings have confirmed the existence, albeit tentative, of this elusive and seldom seen ungulate in the UAE and northern Sultanate of Oman.