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Topi, *Damaliscus lunatus*

Legal Status: Topi (*Damaliscus lunatus* spp.) are currently listed on the IUCN Red List as “Lower Risk/ Conservation Dependent.” (Antelope Specialist Group 1996)

Description: Topi have the short neck and elongated face typical of the Alcelaphinae. There is some variation in the shape of the horns, but they are typically S-shaped. Coat color varies from a bleached yellowish brown to a dark, purplish brown. Adult height at the shoulder ranges from 150-230 cm, adult weight for males range from 120-160 kg, and females 75-150 kg. (Kingdon, 1997) Topi are typically seasonal breeders, producing a single calf weighing 10-12 kg. Females become mature at 1 ½ to 2 years of age, males at 3 years. Males do not typically fight for territories until they are 4 years old. Longevity is 12-15 years. (Haltenorth and Diller, 1980)

Range: Topi are found in patchy distribution across sub-Saharan Africa. There are as many as 9 recognized subspecies of *Damaliscus lunatus*, from the korrigum in western Africa to the tiang of Somalia to the tsesseby of southern Africa. The *jimela* subspecies is found in eastern Africa (Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, and Tanzania), and is distinct from *D.l. topi*, which is limited to the coastal region of East Africa. (Haltenorth and Diller, 1980)

Habitat: Topi are found in grasslands from open plains to tree savannah habitat, preferring medium grasslands. Occasionally found in rolling uplands, topi are generally found in flat low lands below 1500m. (Estes, 1991)

Diet: Topi are almost exclusively grazers, preferring new growth in medium height grasses. (Estes, 1991)

Social Organization: Topi social behavior shows more variation than any other species of antelope. Where habitat is patchy, topi are territorial with males defending a small area and harem of females. In the wide open grasslands, topi are migratory and gather during the breeding season in traditional leks in groups of up to 1,000 animals. Males in this situation defend a small territory only for access to breeding females, and spend much more time in aggressive encounters with other males compared to sedentary groups. Territorial males are known for using termite mounds as a look-out post. Males will also mark their territories with dung piles and by scent marking with their pre-orbital glands. (Estes, 1991)



Threats to Survival: Topi populations have been greatly reduced primarily due to the impact of agriculture (crops and livestock) and hunting pressure. Regional populations may also be affected by drought, disease, changes in native species dynamics or habitat loss due to damming local waterways. This group is currently listed on the IUCN Red List as “Lower Risk/Conservation Dependent.” (Antelope Specialist Group 1996)

Zoo Programs: The animals currently managed in North America are identified as *D.l. jimela*. Two animals in the North American population have no subspecies designation, but are believed to be the *jimela* subspecies, and are included in the managed population. As of January, 2008, the ISIS database listed only 14 topi at 2 institutions. Topi were once more plentiful in captive collections. The 2004 North American Regional Studbook recorded over 300 animals in the historic record from 1964 to 2004. Due to the small population size, this group is currently designated as a research population by the AZA Antelope TAG.

Conservation: Topi were once found in vast herds across sub-Saharan Africa. In the early twentieth century they were thought to have the greatest population of any African antelope. (Spinage, 1986) The IUCN now lists topi as regionally extinct in Burundi; Gambia; Ghana; Mauritania; Mozambique; Senegal; Swaziland, and possibly extinct in Mali and Nigeria. Habitat loss due to competition with livestock and cropland development and hunting pressure continue to be the primary causes for the decline of this species. (Antelope Specialist Group 1996)



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