



Photo credit – Alan Shoemaker. Impala and calf in Nairobi Park

Impala, *Aepyceros melampus*

Legal Status: Impala are not protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act except for the Black-faced Impala, *A .m. petersi*, of Southwest Angola and northern Namibia which is listed as Endangered. No forms are regulated in trade by CITES. The IUCN Antelope Specialist Group considers the most populations of Impalas to be Lower Risk/Conservation Dependent species; the Black-faced Impala is listed as Vulnerable.



Description: The impala is a medium-sized gazelle-like antelope with a medium or reddish brown back that becomes lighter on the shoulders, neck and head, and sharply lighter on the thighs and legs. There is a vertical black streak on each side of the hindquarters. The underside of the body and tail, inside of the upper foreleg, the upper lip and chin are white. Only males have horns, which are lyre-shaped, 19-30 in. (50-75 cm) long and ridged only on the front side. Both sexes possess highly conspicuous glands (black tufts) on the fetlocks that are unique to the species. Males weigh 132-143 lb. (60 – 65 kg); females average 88-99 lb. (40-45 kg). Shoulder height varies from 30-40 in. (7.5 – 100 cm).

Range/Distribution: Presently impala are found in northern Zululand, South Africa, north to the Uasa Nyero River in Kenya and southern Uganda, and from the coast of the Indian Ocean to the Rift Valley and Lake Victoria. Overall they range in open country from Kenya and southern Angola to northern South Africa, and from Namibia to Mozambique.

Traditionally taxonomists recognize six subspecies, including:

South African impala (*Aepyceros melampus melampus*) - Southeast Angola south

Malawi impala (*A. m. johnstoni*) - North Mozambique, Malawi, East Zambia

Katanga impala (*A. m. katangaei*) – Southeast Congo

Black-faced impala (*A. m. petersi*) – Southwest Angola, Southwest Africa

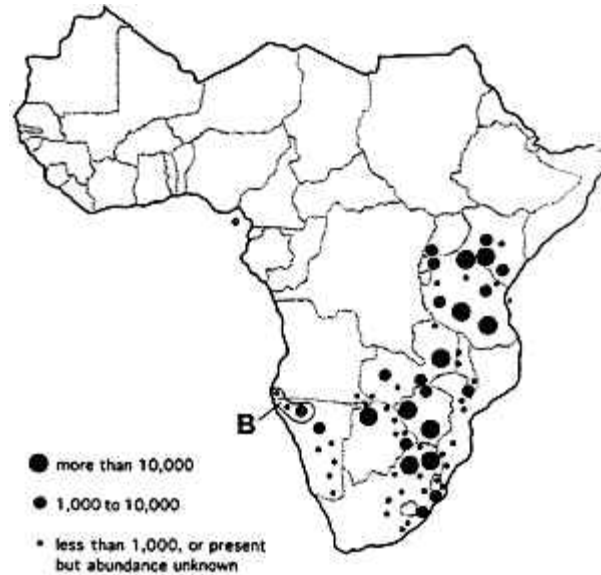
Kenyan impala (*A. m. rendilis*) – Kenya, Uganda

Tanzanian impala (*A. m. suara*) – Tanzania, Rwanda

Habitat: Impala prefer ecotone between open grassland and savanna woodland, and especially acacia woodland. Grassland is occupied during the rains, and woodland areas during the dry season. They require a high-quality fodder (grass or leaves), moisture, shade and cover. Habitat quality causes large variations in density.

Diet: Impala are selective but opportunistic feeders, accepting a broad range of items including grasses, browse, leaves, flowers, pods and seeds. The ration of grass to browse varies from season to season and place to place. Impala are primarily grazers during the rainy season but the amount of grass ingested drops to 30% in the dry season when they enter in the woodlands and browse on shrubs, herbs, pods and seeds. The diet of impala in northwestern Zimbabwe has been reported to change from 94% grass in the wet season to 69% herbs and woody browse in the dry season.

Social Organization: During the dry season, impalas may form aggregations (all ages and both sexes) that number in the hundreds. As the dry season progresses, the groups may split up and spread out more widely, moving more each day in order to make use of the more widely dispersed green shoots and leaves. At other times of the year, there is a more intricate social structure as well as territorial activity. In East Africa where two wet seasons are present, territoriality may extend over most of the year. In South Africa where there is only one wet season, territoriality may last only three months. At these times, the sexes segregate,



with females and young forming herds of 10-100 animals, while males form groups with as many as 60 bachelors. These groups have regular home ranges of .7-2.3 sq. miles (2-6 sq. km). At any given time, about one third of the males in a particular population hold a territory. These territories are .07-.3 sq. miles (.2-.9 sq. km) in size. The resident male attempts to control any herds of female and young that enter his area. From this group, young males six to nine months old are chased off to eventually join the bachelor herds.

Reproduction: Reproduction is closely linked to annual rainfall. In equatorial Africa breeding is continuous throughout the year and births occur in all months. In East Africa, birth peaks are associated with the two rainy seasons in March and November. In southern Africa there is a peak in mating from April – June and a single well-defined birth peak occurring during the single wet season. The estrous cycle is 12-29 days and lasts 24 - 48 hours. After a gestation is 6-7 months, a single offspring is produced. Growth is extremely rapid, with weaning occurring in 5-7 months. Both sexes are independent in less than a year. Males are physiologically capable of reproduction at 13 months and females may conceive at 18 months.

Threats To Survival: Impala are taken by a number of predators: hyenas, leopards, wild dogs, lions and cheetahs.

Zoo Programs/Conservation: A North American Regional Studbook and Population Manager was approved in 1999 to help manage animals held by cooperating institutions. The 2000 studbook reports there to be a population of 173 (35.135.3) individuals being held in 20 participating institutions as of 30 July, 2000 and the Antelope Taxon Advisory Group has assigned impala a target population size of 150 animals. Hundreds more are thought to be held by the private sector. This species has also been determined to be in need of genetic investigation and a Population Management Plan will soon be prepared. Presently all impala are being managed as a single population, regardless of possible subspecies. Although no black-faced impala are present in North America at this time (2001), this subspecies may be imported in the future as available to replace other specimens.



Photo credit – Alan Shoemaker. Impala in Samburu National Park



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