

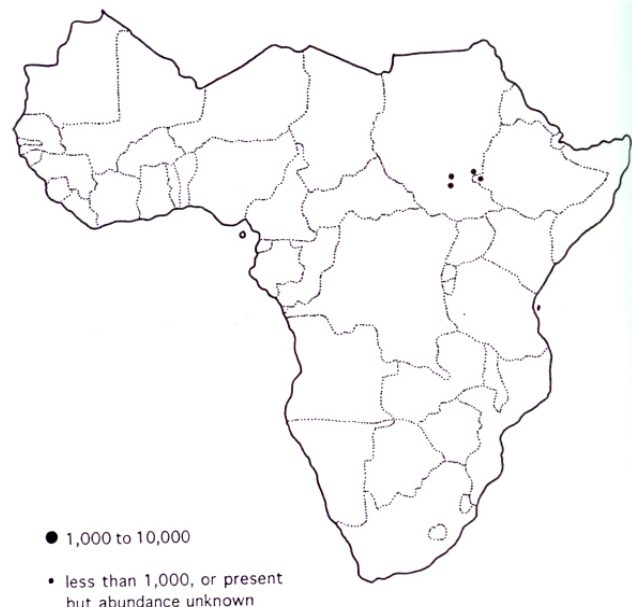
Nile Lechwe, *Kobus megaceros*



Legal Status: Nile lechwe are not protected by the Endangered Species act or regulated in international trade by CITES. Their IUCN Red List considers them to be Lower Risk (Near threatened). The remoteness of their principal habitat, the Sudd swamps of southern Sudan, protects them from most forms of commercial or trophy hunting.

Description: The Nile lechwe is slightly smaller in form than the more common red lechwe, *Kobus leche*, of Botswana and Zambia, males weighing 175- 200 lb., with a shoulder height of 195 inches (Kendal,1998, Kingdon,1982). The male Nile lechwe has horns that are ringed from the skull nearly to the tip and sweep up and backward over the shoulders; females are hornless. Female Nile lechwe are a generally uniform rufous color; males are a distinctive dark chocolate color with a white patch or saddle on the neck and shoulders, and white marks above the eyes and tops of the ears. Significant color changes can be observed seasonally in both sexes and dominant males tend to be much darker in color with larger, striking white patches/saddles (Falchetti, 1994). As in other lechwe, both sexes possess uniquely adapted elongated hooves; the backs of the pasterns are bare of hair, probably in adaptation to the wetland habitats in which they live.

Range: The main wild populations of Nile lechwe reside in the Sudd ecosystem of southern Sudan that lie near the west bank of the Nile River. The Sudd ecosystem is a system of swamps and flooded grasslands. Almost 95% (30-40,000) of the population are found in the Sudd swamp. Much smaller populations (900) are found in the Machar



marshes of the upper Nile near Ethiopia. A limited region in Ethiopia (the proposed Gambella National Park) also contains a small population (East, 1998).

Habitat: Nile lechwe, as with red lechwe, dwell almost exclusively in flood plains and wetlands where they are uniquely adapted to the area's wetlands, swamps and marshes; lechwe are adept swimmers and waders. These swamps are an ancient, major world swamp system that is very little known or understood. The remote habitat has most probably afforded the species adequate protection, despite its limited range in a difficult war torn region.

Diet: Nile lechwe feed on grasses and a few other water-dependent swamp plants.

Social: Female lechwe live in cow/calf herds of up to 50 individuals. Near Lakes Yirkol and Nyubor, herds are larger and reach several hundred individuals in areas possessing good food resources. Female herds contain a single adult male. Other males form bachelor herds.

Threats: The status of this species is satisfactory, the inaccessibility of their habitat providing considerable protection against hunting. Regardless, it is potentially vulnerable because the species largely occurs in only one area. It is not known what impact, if any, the Jonglei Canal will have on their habitat in the Sudd swamps but this project's effect on Nile lechwe is being monitored.

Zoo programs: According to ISIS, captive Nile lechwe are held in collections of North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The current North American population (50.75=125 in 13 institutions) is descendants of Nile lechwe either imported directly from Africa or imported from captive collections in Europe. The North American population contains 19 wild born ancestors since this species' initial appearance in 1962.

Regional studbooks and captive population management plans are also present in Europe.

Conservation: In Sudan, Nile lechwe are specially protected (Schedule II). They also occur in Zeraf, Fanyikang and Shambe Game Reserves. The Zeraf reserve covers 37% of the Sudd ecological zone.

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