



## **Waterbuck, *Kobus ellipsiprymnus***

**Legal Status:** Waterbuck are covered by the U.S. Endangered Species Act or regulated in trade by CITES. The IUCN Antelope Specialist Group considers both forms, the ellipsen or common waterbuck, *Kobus e. ellipsiprymnus*, and the Defassa waterbuck or *Kobus e. defassa*, to be Lower Risk (Conservation Dependent).

**Description:** The waterbuck is characterized by its large size. Female waterbuck are smaller than the males and weigh between 350-400 lb. (158-181 kg.). Males weigh between 470-680 lb. (217-308 kg). Adults generally stand 50 in. (127 cm) at the shoulder. Only males have long, curved horns, but abnormally shaped horns been observed in females on rare occasions. Waterbuck vary in color, even within a single population, with dark gray and rufous animals occurring in the same herd. In general there is a tendency for the males to be darker and grayer and for the females to be warmer in color. Their coat is coarse, shaggy and heavily impregnated with a musky, greasy secretion that is thought to serve two possible functions. One seems to serve as individual scent recognition common in territorial ungulates. The other acts to water-proof an animal that seeks water to escape harassment or for browsing on inundated pastures. Common waterbuck have a characteristic elliptical white ring around their rump while defassa have a tan blaze on the hindquarters below the tail.

**Range:** Defassa waterbuck live west of the Rift, Luangwa, and middle Zambesi valleys. The common race occurs in these valleys to the East. Hybrids occur wherever the two races overlap, including the Nairobi area and in Ngorongoro Crater.

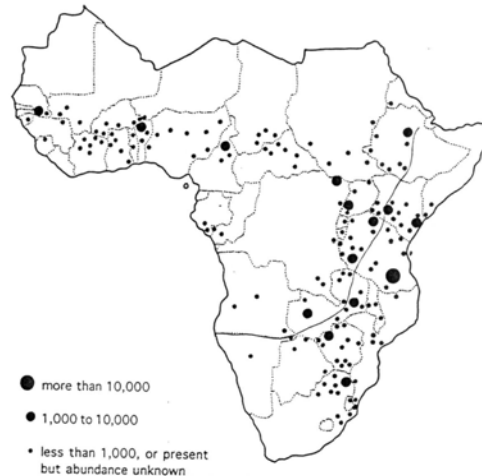
**Habitat:** Waterbuck prefer grassland habitat near water. The best habitats are those near small drainage systems and in valleys. While they prefer dry ground, waterbuck remain close to water for food and as an escape from predators. At night they seek thickets for cover.

**Diet:** Waterbuck are grazers, feeding on medium and short grasses that are rich in protein. Most concentrate on perennial grasses such as *Brachiaria latifolia* and *Cynodon dactylon*. Waterbuck also eat foliage and herbs when green grass is unavailable. They have a low tolerance for dehydration and stay within a few miles of water.

**Social Organization:** Groups of three to six cows and half-grown young are common. Female herds can grow up to 30 when congregating in the open. There is no established rank order or leader among female waterbuck. Bachelor groups haunting the periphery of territories frequently number four or five young males. As many as 15 males have been observed banding together. Old bulls are sometimes solitary. Adult males may live as satellites and manage to mate with females.

**Threats to Survival:** The population of waterbuck is decreasing for both subspecies because of uncontrolled poaching and human encroachment along its readily accessible riverine habitat. Another limiting factor on waterbuck populations is predation, mostly on calves. Leopard, hyena, and lion are the main predators. The total population estimate is 200,000. The density of waterbuck at Lake Nakuru National Park, Kenya, reaches up to 100 animals per sq km but typically the density is 1-2 animals per sq km. About 63% of the common waterbuck are found in protected areas or on private land. It is estimated that 60% of defassa waterbuck are in protected areas.

**Zoo Programs:** The North American regional studbook and the Population Management Plan of the AZA Antelope and Giraffe TAG targets common waterbuck as the recommended subspecies; Defassa waterbuck will be phased out of collections. Waterbuck are thought to have high exhibit value in zoo collections. According to the May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2008 Studbook-like report supplied by the International Species Information



System (ISIS), there are 248 Common waterbuck specimens in ISIS-participating collections in North America. Many others are thought to be held by the private sector. In North America the Antelope and Giraffe TAG recommends a target population for participating zoos of 100 animals.

**Conservation:** Human encroachment and habitat destruction contribute to the decline of waterbuck populations in Africa. Protected areas are important for the survival of this species, especially since waterbuck are so dependent on grassland habitats in close proximity to water. Waterbuck are hunted for sport in Africa creating a strong motive to provide effective protection and management of waterbuck.



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