

ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT DISTRIBUTION OF THE FOREST HOG (*Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*) IN ETHIOPIA

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Abstract: New data on the present distribution of *Hylochoerus* in Ethiopia are presented and compared with ancient records. The distribution is analysed and discussed. Recommendations for further priority research and conservation action for the species is given.

Keywords: *Hylochoerus*, Suidae, Conservation, Africa.

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1. Introduction

Once distributed over a wide range of woodlands and Afromontane forests in southern Ethiopia, the Forest hog (*Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*) population is said to have been divided into various isolated sub-populations due to deforestation, hunting and the extension of agricultural lands.

Accounts about the present distribution of the Forest hog in Ethiopia are rare and often very vague; most of the records published in the literature are contained in Ansell (1971) and Yalden *et al.* (1984). These authors enumerate the locations and/or areas where the species was known to occur at the time and list historical records of both field observations and trophies collections. The climatic and tectonic barriers which separate the Ethiopian population of *Hylochoerus* from those of Sudan, Uganda and Kenya have made it to evolve in isolation for a very long period of time. This led several authors (d'Huart, 1978; Yalden *et al.*, *op cit.*) to believe that the Forest hog in Ethiopia might be representing a new subspecies, distinct from the nominate (or "giant") race *Hylochoerus m. meinertzhageni*. Indeed, these ecological barriers are much older than the Dahomey Gap, which separates two distinct subspecies of Forest hog, *H.m. woriensis* and *H.m. rimator*. In a recent review of the priorities of conservation actions and research on the Afrotropical Suids (d'Huart & Oliver, 1993) it has been recommended that further investigations on the distribution, conservation and taxonomic status of *Hylochoerus* be made in Ethiopia. The present preliminary assessment has been carried out in that context.

2. Present distribution

On the basis of a review of recent publications (Sierra Club International, 1987; Hillman 1993) and of interviews with various Ethiopian experts, we have been able to draw a preliminary map of the present distribution of *Hylochoerus* in the country (Fig.1). This information is undoubtedly incomplete and further data will be collected in the future.

List of areas/locations where Forest hogs are known or reported to occur:

- Ilubabor/Kefa Province:

1. a vast area extending from the eastern part of Gambela N.P. to the South-East, including Abobo, Gog, Godare, Kaffa Mountains, Guraferda, Bebeke, Tepi, Mizan Teferi and Temenja Yazhi.

- Kefa Province:

2. a limited area between Bonga, Diri Goma and Ameya.
3. between Ameya and Shama.
4. a 30km radius around Jima.
5. between Alga, Atnago, Suntu Genet and Botor Bocho.

- Gamo Gofa Province:

6. the Maze region, between Gesuba, Galecha and Zefine.

- Sidamo Province:

7. a vast area between Finchawa, Agere Maryam, Fiseha Genet, Solemo and Jeri Bule.
8. between Shakiso, Zembaba and Irba Muda.

- Bale Province:

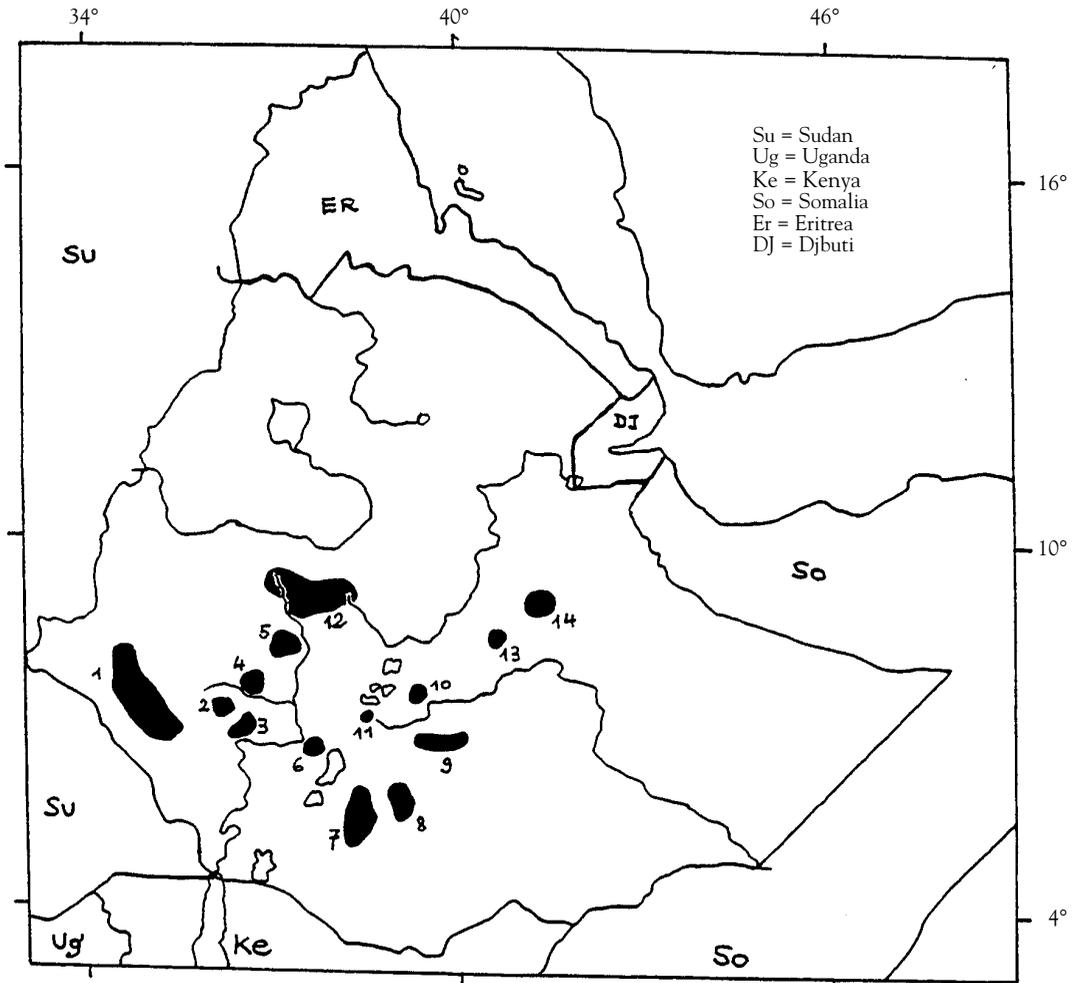


Figure 1 - Distribution of *Hylochoerus* in Ethiopia

9. the vast Hareenna Forest, in the Southern part of Bale N.P., North of Mena.

- Arssi Province:

10. between Meraro, Gobesa, Ticho, Lemu and Bekoji.

- Shewa Province:

11. forested areas surrounding Wondo Genet.
 12. a vast area between Adis Alem, Ginchi, Gedo, Bako, Tibe, Seyo, Shenan, Arbi Bila and Boda, including Menagesha Forest Reserve.

- Harerge Province:

13. Kuni Muktar Mountain Nyala Sanctuary,

between Kuni and Bedesa.

14. Chercher Mountains between Bike, Waybera, Muleta, Kobo and Karamile.

As such, this fragmented distribution does not confirm the records of *Hylochoerus* in the area of Gore (Ilubabor Province) as reported in Yalden *et al.* (*op.cit.*), but it confirms its continued presence in all previously reported areas. In addition, a number of new areas have been added to the known distribution.

3. Discussion

Having superimposed this distribution map of *Hylochoerus* on the vegetation, topographic and conservation areas maps published by

Hillman (*op.cit.*), the following remarks can be made:

- there seem to be two distinct sub-populations of Forest hog separated by the Rift Valley; although this does not represent an impassable obstacle for the species, further investigations should assess the taxonomical homogeneity of the Ethiopian populations.

- *Hylochoerus* still inhabits a wide range of forested habitats: these are principally undifferentiated Ethiopian woodlands, evergreen or semi-evergreen bushlands and thickets and Afromontane forests (*Podocarpus*, *Juniper* or *Hagenia*). It is obvious that both *Acacia/Commiphora* bushland and thickets, as well as tropical altimontane formations are avoided. This can be explained by the Forest hog's need for very dense cover in some parts of its habitat, but also by the fact that the species tends to avoid extreme variations between diurnal and nocturnal temperatures (d'Huart, *op.cit.*).

- the species is scattered in small isolated populations; it is not clear yet as to what the main causes of these isolations are (deforestation, extension of agricultural lands, overhunting, etc.), and this aspect is worth further investigations. It is possible, however, that the distribution of *Hylochoerus* in Ethiopia is wider than shown in figure 1 and that connecting corridors between the populations of those areas do exist.

- most of the areas shown in figure 1 are above 2,000 m in altitude; this is particularly evident for *Hylochoerus* population living close to the Rift Valley, where human pressure is higher. Therefore, these remnant areas might possibly be seen as isolated refuges.

- *Hylochoerus* lives mainly outside the existing protected areas; Gambela N.P.(1), Bale N.P.(9) and Kuni Muktar Sanctuary (13) seem to be the three single areas allocated to nature protection where the species exists. Some of the other places are comprised within "Controlled Hunting Areas" like Akobo and Mizan Teferi (1), Maze (6), Bale (9), Arssi (10) and Chercher & Abba Guggu Mountain (14). In the absence of precise knowledge on the levels and trends of these populations, this situation does not guarantee a sustainable conservation management of the species. The recent decision (September 1993) by the Ethiopian authorities to temporarily ban all forms of hunting has been taken as a precautionary measure in order to avoid excessive off-take of some fragile species.

4. Conclusion

Although the results of our assessment has revealed new informations about the distribution of the Forest hog in Ethiopia, it has also stressed the many gaps in our knowledge of basic data on this species. As recommended by d'Huart and Oliver (*op.cit.*), no appropriate conservation management of *Hylochoerus* in Ethiopia could be implemented unless further research is conducted in the following areas: taxonomical status, geographical distribution, level and trends of the various sub-populations, revision of the protected areas network, revision and adaptation of the legislation related to conservation and management of the species.

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