

## AN OLD REFERENCE TO 'HARTEBEEST' IN THE TRANSSVAAL LOWVELD

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Dr. Percy Rendall FZS, who visited the Transvaal Lowveld during 1893 and 1894, made the following statement in a field-note on the antelopes which he encountered in the region:

'THE HARTEBEESTE. *Bubalis caama*.

Zulu: *Indhluzela*

There are a few of these antelopes on the banks of the Krokodil River, opposite Hector's Spruit, and also in the East Lydenburg District of the Transvaal and in South Gazaland.' (Rendall 1895).

The northern bank of the Crocodile River opposite Hectorspruit and the eastern portion of the Lydenburg District fall within the present Kruger National Park. Gazaland is one of the provinces of southern Moçambique. The Zulu name and scientific name mentioned by Dr. Rendall suggest that he was referring to the red hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus caama*. The Zulu names for red hartebeest are *Indhluzele* and *Inkolongwane* (Vincent *in litt.*; Wilkes *in litt.*). If Dr. Rendall's statement is accepted at face value, one would have to accept that red hartebeest once occurred in what is now the Kruger National Park.

I am not aware of other references to the occurrence of red hartebeest in the Transvaal Lowveld or southern Moçambique. The question arises: were the antelopes in question red hartebeest or were they the closely-related Lichtenstein's hartebeest *A. lichtensteinii* or tsessebe *Damaliscus lunatus*? Dr. Rendall accurately described and named 15 other antelope species, even distinguishing between steenbok *Raphicerus campestris* and Sharpe's grysbok *R. sharpei*, which indicates that he was well-acquainted with the various antelope species. There are no Zulu names for Lichtenstein's hartebeest and tsessebe.

Pienaar (*in litt.*) thinks that Lichtenstein's hartebeest could have occurred, albeit in small numbers, in the northern part of the Kruger National Park. Col. J. Stevenson-Hamilton, the first Warden of the Kruger National Park, mentioned in his Annual Report for 1908 that two small herds of *hartebeest* occurred in the northern section of the old Shingwedzi Reserve while tsessebe

were fairly widespread throughout that region (Pienaar *in litt.*). Strangely, he never subsequently referred to hartebeest from that region in his books and annual reports.

A small relict population of Lichtenstein's hartebeest in the extreme north-eastern part of the Inhambane District of Moçambique (Smithers & Lobao Tello 1976; Smithers 1983) and another in south-eastern Zimbabwe (Smithers & Wilson 1979; Booth 1980) represent the present southern limit of the distribution of the species. The latter population occurs *ca* 100 km north-east of Pafuri, the northern tip of the Kruger National Park.

The Pongola Game Reserve, a strip of the south-eastern Transvaal wedged between Swaziland and Zululand 220 km south of the Kruger National Park, was proclaimed on 13 June 1894 and deproclaimed in 1921. In his first Annual Report, Warden H.F. Van Oordt mentioned that both hartebeest and tsessebe occurred in the reserve (Pringle 1982). It has been suggested that the hartebeest referred to was in fact Lichtenstein's hartebeest as the area was deemed ecologically unsuitable for red hartebeest (Smithers 1983). If Lichtenstein's hartebeest in fact occurred so far south, Dr. Rendall's note may refer to the same species. There are many references to red hartebeest in northern and north-eastern Natal (Rowe-Rowe *in litt.*) and this may have been the species reported in the Pongola Game Reserve by Van Oordt.

Dr. Rendall's note does not confirm beyond a reasonable doubt the historical occurrence of either red or Lichtenstein's hartebeest in the southern portion of the Kruger National Park. If either species occurred it must have been in very low numbers as they were evidently not referred to by other travellers and hunters. The possibility remains that Dr. Rendall may have mistaken tsessebe for red hartebeest.

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