

Short communication

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A NOTE ON SOME OF THE SCHEDULED MAMMALS FROM THE SEMI-ARID HABITATS ADJACENT TO THE BACKWATERS OF UJANI WETLAND IN MAHARASHTRA STATE

Pune district is represented by some of the most interesting and important mammalian fauna like leopard, wolf, blackbuck, gazelle, giant squirrel etc. However, mammalian fauna from the plains of eastern side is different from that of the hilly western tracts of the district. Ujani wetland is on the plains and the mammalian fauna is, naturally, different from that of the western side. Due to importance of the region it was decided to undertake the survey of the mammalian species of this region.

Ujani wetland is formed due to the construction of a dam across Bhima river near Bhimanagar in Pune Dist. The waterspread area of the dam is about 62 sq. kms. The reservoir forms border for Pune, Ahmednagar and Sholapur districts in Maharashtra State. Before construction of the dam, the region was coming under semi-arid zone with very less rainfall. There was no forest cover and it was all dry eariler. After construction of the dam, the surrounding area is being utilized for agricultural purpose with the predominance of sugarcane crop. However, as one goes farther from the dam, one notices the same semi-arid ecology of the past in the adjacent areas of Pune, Ahmednagar and Sholapur districts. Hence, the mammalian fauna of this region has remained the same even after construction of the dam. Some of the important mammalian species reported from the region are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1 : Some of the important mammalian species

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific Name
1.	Leopard or Panther	<i>Panthera pardus</i> (Linnaeus)
2.	Desert Cat	<i>Felis silvestris</i> Forster
3.	Common mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsi</i> (Geoffroy)
4.	Striped Hyaena	<i>Hyaena hyaena</i> (Linnaeus)

5.	Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i> Linnaeus
6.	Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i> Linnaeus
7.	Indian Fox	<i>Vulpes</i> spp.
8.	Smooth Indian Otter	<i>Lutra perspicillata</i> I. Geoff.
9.	Indian porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i> Kerr
10.	Indian Hare	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i> F. Cuvier
11.	Indian Gazelle or Chinkara	<i>Gazella bennettii</i> (Sykes)
12.	Indian Antelope or Blackbuck	<i>Antelope cervicapra</i> (Linnaeus)

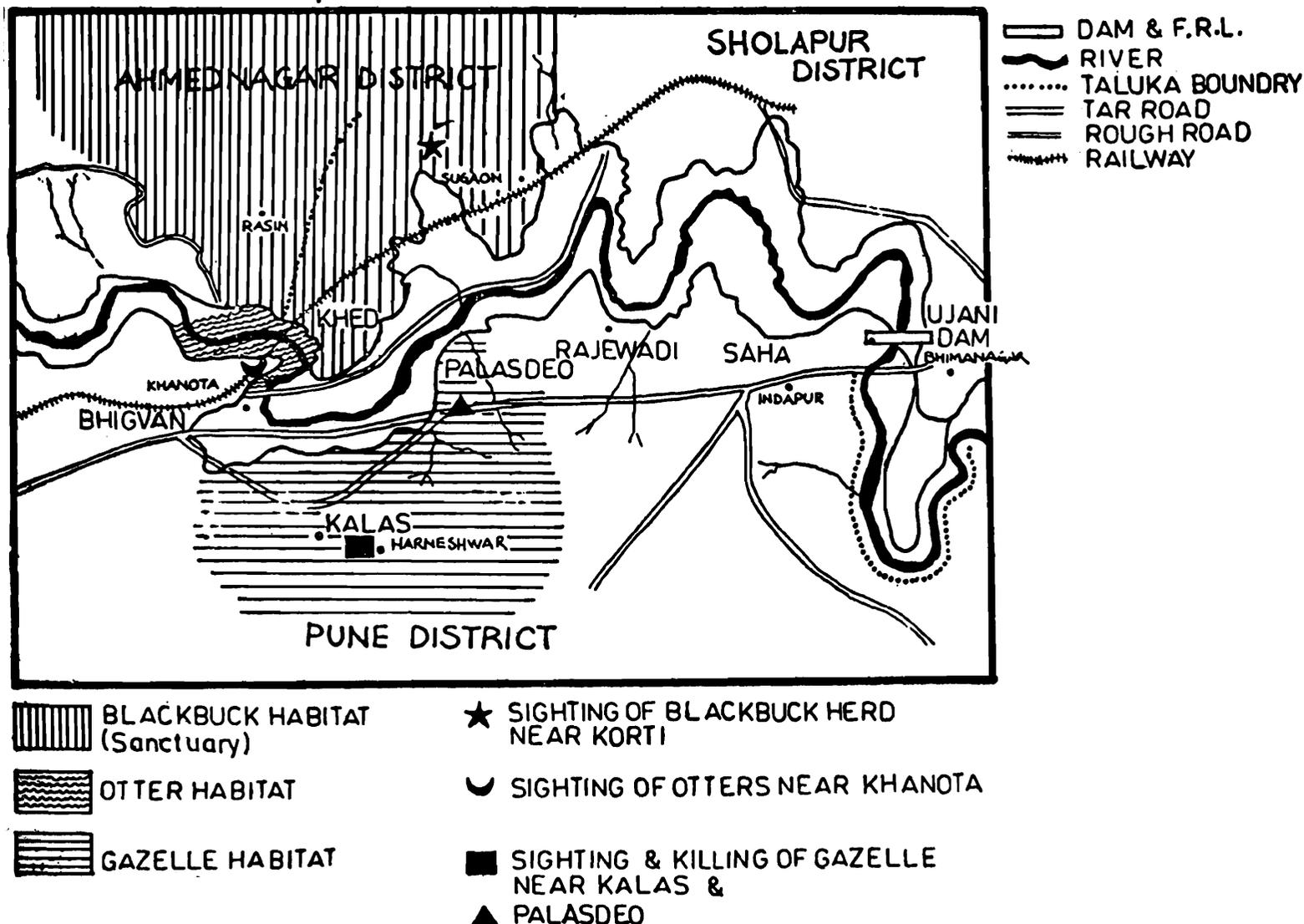
As per the earlier reports, blackbuck, gazelle and otter are the resident species of this region, while most of the other species like leopard, wolf, cat, hyaena, jackal etc. are migratory populations. They undertake migration as per the availability of food. The region is already supposed to be vitally important for 160 avian (Bharucha and Gogte, 1990) and 42 fish (Yazdani and Singh, 1990) species. Apart from preparing the list of important mammalian fauna (Table 1) during the surveys of Ujani wetland, it was also decided to record observations on some of the scheduled mammalian species, namely, blackbuck, gazelle and otter. The species-wise account is as follows,

(A) Smooth Otter (*Lutra Perspicillata* I. Geoffroy) :

Bharucha and Gogte (1990) have reported occurrence of otters in Ujani waters. The otters were, in fact, trapped in the fishing nets set near Khanota. However, they escaped by tearing the nets. Torn nets with damaged fish specimens were shown by the local fishermen during the survey undertaken in Sept. 1990. Snatching of fishes by otters is quite natural as fish forms a delicacy for them. Otter population appears to be taking shelter in the bushy forested and unapproachable areas near Khanota and Khed. (See Map). Fishing is almost impossible due to the wild growth of these bushes. One can easily see large-sized fishes and freshwater turtles in the water under the bridge near Rajegaon Farm. The fish fauna is rich and includes fish species like *Rhinomugil corsula*, *Channa* spp., *Labeo* spp., *Labeo* spp., *Catla* spp., *Mastacembalus* spp. etc. (Pradhan and Singh, 1984 & Yazdani and Singh, 1990). Thus, the habitat around Khanota and Khed is quite appropriate for the growth of the otter population. The otters appear to be undertaking local migrations also, because they have been sighted at different places in different seasons by various authorities. At the time of the survey undertaken by

the ZSI survey party in Sept. 1990 the otter population had shifted to the upper parts of Bhima river near Shirur, since the reservoir was full to its capacity. However, protection and growth of the natural habitat near Khanota may restrict its local migrations and otter population may concentrate in this favourable habitat. Hence, it is strongly recommended that every attempt must be made to restore the habitat and give full protection to the existing otter population.

Map of Bhigwan area of Ujani Wetland showing habitat utilization by some of the scheduled mammalian species



(B) Blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra* Linnaeus) :

The region between Rasin-Korti-Sugaon belt (See Map) forms a part of Blackbuck and Great Indian Bustard sanctuary in Maharashtra. There were agricultural fields all over the region with predominance of sugarcane crops when the area was surveyed in Sept. 1990. At that time a small herd of blackbucks was observed in the sugarcane fields near Korti. Forest Dept. authorities from Indapur (Pune Dist.) have confirmed recent sighting of a small herd of Blackbucks near Rasin, also, in Oct. 1994. Based on 1989 census the Forest Dept. authorities have reported occurrence of about 3450 blackbucks in the sanctuary area of about 8500 sq. kms. (Indurkar, 1991). The report, however, states that most of the population has concentrated more in a small area near Rehekuri in Ahmednagar Dist. Rehekuri is about seventy five kms. away from the reservoir. The blackbuck populations near Rehekuri are causing serious damage to the standing crops (Indurkar, 1991). In another instance during one of the inspection surveys undertaken earlier in 1987, the author had an opportunity of sighting a small herd of five to six blackbucks in the agricultural fields near Barshi town in Sholapur Dist. Barshi town lies at the distal end of Great Indian Bustard sanctuary. In the light of these observations it appears that the blackbuck populations have started spreading within the sanctuary areas. The spread of blackbuck populations is possibly due to the reduction in the number of its predators like leopard and wolf.

(C) Chinkara or Indian Gazelle *Gazella bennettii* (Sykes) :

At least two gazelles were sighted in June, 1989, on Sholapur highway near Palasdeo by the Zoological Survey of India survey parties. During Sept. 1990 survey local people informed us that there was a population of gazelles in and around Kalas-Harneshwar region which is about ten kms. south of Palasdeo. When surveyed, entire region was found to be semi-arid with patches of scrubby forest spread everywhere. It was an ideal habitat for gazelles. One deer, shot near Harneshwar by a poacher in 1990, was identified as *Gazella bennettii* (Sikes). One more case of a poaching of a gazelle from the same region was registered in Oct. 1994 by the Forest Dept. authorities.

Now, if one takes a careful look at the map, it will be seen that parts of Ujani backwaters and the surrounding landmass serve as an excellent habitat for the most interesting vertebrate fauna which includes scheduled mammalian and reptilian species in addition to the important migratory avian and commercially important fish species. Hence, it is strongly recommended that the entire area should be well protected from habitat destruction and may be declared as a conservation area. Such protection may result in the growth of the multiparous biological diversities in the entire zone.

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