

THE BLACKBUCK STORY

Dr. Samik Roy

The Black Buck is an endangered antelope found roaming in the plains of India except the western coast of India. In India the species is wide spread in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamilnadu and other areas throughout peninsular India. In 1982, the estimated population of Blackbuck in India was between 22,500 to 24,500. According to 1993 estimation, the population of Blackbuck in India was between 10,000 and is stable or increasing.

This beautiful animal is covered with dark brown or black, sleek fur. The chest, belly, muzzle and chin of the males are covered in white fur. The eyes of the male are covered in white rings. The males have ringed horns that grow up to about 28 inches in length. They weigh about 70 to 95 pounds and grow up to a height of about 32 inches. The females are much smaller than their male counterparts. The females also have horns but they are not ringed or spiraled. They have very good eyesight and are also very fast runners, which comprise its main defense against predators.

The black buck mostly lives in open grasslands, dry scrub areas, thinly forested areas. They are generally seen in the area where there are good sources of water all the year round. Blackbucks cannot sustain cold climate. Hence, they are mostly found in the desert areas of Rajasthan and coastal areas

SOCIETY Language and Culture



The black bucks are active during the day and their activities generally slow down with the onset of noon. They generally move in herds. The size of the herd depends upon the availability of forage and natural habitat. The size of the herd can go from 3 to 23

individuals. The male attains maturity at the age of 3 while the female attains maturity at the age of two. The mating season lasts from August to October and from March to April. The females can give birth two times in a year.

Blackbuck is a herbivorous animal. They are grazers of grasses. They love feeding on sedges, fall witch grass, mesquite, live oak etc., They also love the leaves of acacia tree.

Present distribution in Odisha:

Blackbucks are confined to Balukhand-Konark coastal plain / wildlife sanctuary in Puri District; Balipadar-Bhetnoi and adjacent areas in Ganjam District. In Odisha the estimated population of Blackbuck is about 800 to 900.



The Balipadar-Bhetnoi area comprises of about 70 villages of Buguda, Aska and Kodala forest ranges of Ganjam District. The Blackbucks of these areas are protected religiously by the local society.

The Blackbucks of Balipadar-Bhetnoi areas are protected by the local people for several generations. As the story goes more than a century ago, there had a long spell of drought in the locality. During this period, a small group of Blackbuck appeared in the area after which it rained and the drought spell was broken. Since then, people started protecting these animals devotedly as they feel that their fate is linked with these Blackbucks.

My experience with the Black Buck

Last December (2020), during our trip to Chilka and Gopalpur we were lucky enough to have met a few groups of these Black Bucks. The location was Barasara village, about 5-6 kilometres away from the Kolkata-Chennai expressway, close to the small town of Rambha near Chilka.

The group was grazing in the paddy field, which had been recently harvested. It was headed by a dominant male with his harem of females, and a few juvenile ones.

We got a few snaps of them in their usual playful mood. The dominant alpha male was seen protecting his females from the adolescent males by expelling them from his territory.

The golden light of the setting sun on the elegant male Black Buck is one magnificent

Soci



ture

moment which will remain etched in my memory.



(Dr. Samik Roy is an Eminent Dental Surgeon, Eminent Photographer, Kolkata, West Bengal)