

= Royal antelope =

The royal antelope (*Neotragus pygmaeus*) is a West African antelope , recognised as the world 's smallest antelope . It was first described by Swedish zoologist Carl Linnaeus in 1758 . It stands up to merely 25 centimetres (10 in) at the shoulder and weighs 2 @. @ 5 ? 3 kilograms (5 @. @ 5 ? 6 @. @ 6 lb) . A characteristic feature is the long and slender legs , with the hindlegs twice as long as the forelegs . Horns are possessed only by males ; the horns @-@ short , smooth and spiky @-@ measure 2 @. @ 5 ? 3 centimetres (1 @. @ 0 ? 1 @. @ 2 in) and bend backward . The soft coat is reddish to golden brown , in sharp contrast with the white ventral parts . In comparison to Bates 's pygmy antelope , the royal antelope has a longer muzzle , broader lips , a smaller mouth and smaller cheek muscles .

Typically nocturnal (active at night) , the royal antelope exhibits remarkable alertness . Territories are marked with dung . A herbivore , the royal antelope prefers small quantities of fresh foliage and shoots ; fruits and fungi may be taken occasionally . Like other neotragines , the royal antelope is monogamous . Both sexes can become sexually mature by as early as six months . Births have been reported in November and December . A single , delicate young is born after an unknown gestational period .

The royal antelope prefers areas with fresh and dense growth of shrubs and other plants . It inhabits the warm , moist lowland forests prevalent in western African countries such as Côte d 'Ivoire , Ghana , Guinea , Liberia and Sierra Leone . The royal antelope has been categorised as Least Concern by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) . The populations are feared to be declining due to habitat deterioration and expanding human settlement . A significant threat to the survival of this antelope is hunting for bushmeat .

= = Taxonomy and etymology = =

The scientific name of the royal antelope is *Neotragus pygmaeus* . It is placed in the genus *Neotragus* and the family Bovidae . It was first described by Swedish zoologist Carl Linnaeus in the 10th edition of *Systema Naturae* (1758) . German zoologist Peter Simon Pallas recognised two species ? *Tragulus pygmaeus* and *Antilope pygmaea* . However , both of them were found to have the same type , the royal antelope . Hence these were treated as synonyms for *N. pygmaeus* .

The generic name *Neotragus* is constituted by two Greek words : *neo* (" new ") and *tragus* (" he @-@ goat ") , while the specific name *pygmaeus* comes from the Greek *pugmaios* (" as small as a fist " , in reference to the diminutive size of the antelope) . The vernacular name " royal antelope " is based on a statement made by Willem Bosman , a merchant associated with the Dutch West India Company , that the antelope was called " the king of the harts " (" hart " means " deer " in Old English) by locals .

The tribe Neotragini comprises a variety of dwarf antelopes apart from *Neotragus* ? these include *Dorcatragus* (beira) , *Ourebia* (oribi) , *Madoqua* (dik dik) , *Oreotragus* (klipspringer) and *Raphicerus* . The tribe has been shown to be paraphyletic . A 2014 phylogenetic analysis based on cytochrome b sequences and linear skull measurements showed polyphyly in *Neotragus* . The royal antelope is not closely related to the other two species in its genus ? *sunii* (*N. moschatus*) and Bates 's pygmy antelope (*N. batesi*) . The latter two are closely related , while the royal antelope is likely to have had an ancestor in common with the klipspringer and duikers (subfamily Cephalophinae) .

= = Description = =

The royal antelope is the smallest antelope in the world ; it is the smallest ungulate and ruminant as well . Bates 's pygmy antelope is only slightly larger . The royal antelope reaches merely 25 centimetres (10 in) at the shoulder and weighs 2 @. @ 5 ? 3 kilograms (5 @. @ 5 ? 6 @. @ 6 lb) . The head @-@ and @-@ body length is typically 40 centimetres (16 in) . A characteristic feature is the long and slender legs , with the hindlegs twice as long as the forelegs ? a remarkable similarity

to the hare . The thin tail , 5 ? 8 centimetres (2 @. @ 0 ? 3 @. @ 1 in) long , is white on the inside and ends in a white tuft . The species is sexually dimorphic , with females being larger than males . Only males possess horns , these being short , smooth and spiky , measuring 2 @. @ 5 ? 3 centimetres (1 @. @ 0 ? 1 @. @ 2 in) long and bending backward .

The soft coat is reddish to golden brown , in sharp contrast with the white ventral parts . A brown band runs across the chest , and a distinct rufous collar can be observed on the neck . The chin and the insides of the legs are also white . The face is characterised by large , round dark brown eyes , small translucent ears , the slim muzzle , and the large grayish pink rhinarium .

= = Ecology and behaviour = =

The royal antelope exhibits remarkable alertness , and consequently little is known about its behaviour . The animal will immediately seek cover if alarmed and flees as soon as the danger is very close . It can move swiftly , either by sprinting fast with the body low to the ground , or through strong leaps powered by the large , well @-@ muscled hindlegs . It can cover 2 @. @ 8 metres (9 @. @ 2 ft) in a single leap , and rise as high as 55 centimetres (22 in) above the ground . It is typically nocturnal (active at night) , though activity may also be observed during the day . It generally rests or ruminates during the day . Territories are marked with dung . The reduced size of the preorbital glands , which are used for scent @-@ marking , could indicate that marking behaviour is not very prominent in this antelope .

= = = Diet = = =

A herbivore , the royal antelope prefers small quantities of fresh foliage and shoots ; fruits and fungi may be taken occasionally . Though the antelope is considered to be nocturnal , zoologist Jonathan Kingdon holds that feeding occurs throughout the day , though some foraging may also be observed at night . In comparison to Bates 's pygmy antelope , the royal antelope has a longer muzzle , broader lips , a smaller mouth and smaller cheek muscles . These features do not allow complete digestion of lignified growth . Individuals may often move into new locations foraging for fresh growth .

= = = Reproduction = = =

Like other neotragines , the royal antelope is monogamous , though polygamy has been occasionally observed . Both sexes can become sexually mature by as early as six months . Births have been reported in November and December . Typically a single , delicate young is born after an unknown gestational period , weighing 0 @. @ 8 ? 1 kilogram (1 @. @ 8 ? 2 @. @ 2 lb) ? nearly a third of an adult 's weight . Young appear the same as adults in terms of colouration . The maximum lifespan of a captive royal antelope was estimated at six years and eight months by a 1993 study .

= = Habitat and distribution = =

The royal antelope prefers areas with fresh and dense growth of shrubs and other plants . It inhabits the warm , moist lowland forests prevalent in western African countries such as Côte d 'Ivoire , Ghana , Guinea , Liberia and Sierra Leone . The habitat also includes forest fringes and secondary forests . The range extends eastward from the Kounounkan Massif in southwestern Guinea through Sierra Leone , Liberia and Côte d 'Ivoire to the Volta River in Ghana . The royal antelope may also be found in the region north to the forested areas of western Africa , which is marked by the interface of forest and savannah habitats .

= = Threats and conservation = =

The royal antelope has been categorised as Least Concern by the International Union for the

Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) . In 1999 , Rod East of the IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group estimated the total population to be about 62 000 , however this is likely to be an underestimate . The populations are feared to be declining due to habitat deterioration and expanding human settlement . A significant threat to the survival of this antelope is hunting for bushmeat ; it is seldom hunted in Sierra Leone and Liberia , whereas it is a major source of bushmeat in Côte d 'Ivoire . Protected areas where the royal antelope occurs include the Tai National Park , Haut Bandama Fauna and Flora Reserve and Mabi Yaya Classified Forest (Côte d 'Ivoire) ; Kakum National Park and Assin Attandanso Game Production Reserve (Ghana) ; Ziama and Diecke Forest Reserves (Guinea) ; Tiwai Island and Gola Rainforest National Park (Sierra Leone) .