MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

1. EFFECT OF NEEM AZADIRACHTA INDICA LEAVES ON WOUNDED COMMON LANGUR SEMNOPITHECUS ENTELLUS (DUFRENSE)¹

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On the morning of May 15, 2003, at around 1130 hrs, I spotted a Common Langur Semnopithecus entellus (Dufrense) sitting on the Neem Azadirachta indica tree in my backyard. He seemed sick and this interested me. On closer observation, I noticed that his right arm was lacerated and there were wounds on his loins. Probably it was the result of a fight between him and a dog. I kept a pot of water, some fruits and a roti for him under the tree. After a lapse of two hours he came down the tree painfully and drank some water. He did not touch anything else that was kept for him. He climbed up the tree slowly and started eating Neem leaves. I observed him periodically all through the day. Most of the time, I found him eating the Neem leaves.

The next morning again I found him on the same tree. I replaced water, fruits and roti and posted our chowkidar (guard) there for observation. At about 1400 hrs he came down, drank water and climbed back again without touching the food, but was seen eating the Neem leaves the entire day. On the third morning, looking somewhat better, he again drank the water and kept on eating the Neem leaves. This continued for five days. The wounds started healing rapidly and he became more agile. On the sixth day around 1215 hrs he climbed down the tree and went away. By then he had almost recovered.

2. ATTEMPTED PREDATION ON BLUE SHEEP PSEUDOIS NAYaur (HODGSON) BY DHOLES CUON ALPINUS (PALLAS) IN CHINA¹

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The principal predator of the Blue Sheep (Pseudois nayaur) (Hodgson) throughout its range on the Tibetan plateau is generally considered to be the Snow Leopard (Uncia uncia) (Qil et al. 1993; Schaller 1998). Lambs may also be taken by eagles (Aquila spp.) or other raptors, and the Wolf (Canis lupus) may be an important predator in some areas (Schaller 1998). Although the geographic range of the Dhole (Cuon alpinus) (Pallas) is universally represented as including all the high elevation areas of western China (Cohen 1977; Fox 1984; Ginsberg and MacDonald 1990; Sheldon 1992; Zheng 1994), few documented reports on its distribution or ecology in China have been published. Dholes are known to prey on numerous ungulates, but there exist only vague references to them attacking members of the Subfamily Caprinae (Hepburn et al. 1998). Here, I report an instance of attempted predation on a group of Blue Sheep by a pack of Dholes in the Qilian Shan, Gansu, China. The Qilian Shan region is treeless, characterized by dry shrub and semi-desert grassland vegetation, and is generally devoid of vegetation above 4,300 m (Bedunah and Harris 2002).

On September 24, 2003, while surveying wildlife in a portion of Aksai County, Gansu Province, China (see Harris and Pletscher 2002), I was walking along a small creek that flows northward from the main crest of the Danghe Nanshan Range (part of the Qilian Mountains) at c. 38° 45’N, 95° 50’E. At about 0840 hrs, I noticed movement on the steep ridgeline on the east-facing slope opposite me, at an elevation of c. 4,200 m and around 500 m from me. At first, I suspected the movement was that of wolves because I had seen a pair of wolves in this same drainage during a similar survey three years earlier. However, upon inspection with binoculars, I confirmed the animals to be a pack of seven Dholes (of which one was clearly a pup, based on smaller size, duller coloration, and softer pelage).

Only a few seconds after I began observing the pack with a 40x spotting scope, the lead animal, followed soon afterwards by a second animal, began crouching in a stalking movement with its head lowered. I initially assumed that the Dholes were stalking Himalayan Snowcocks (Tetrao urogallus himalayensis), which I could hear calling from where the Dholes were heading. However, a few seconds later the lead pair, followed quickly by the others, sprinted across and down the slope, surprising a group of 11 Blue Sheep which I had not seen previously. I was able to count the Blue Sheep as they fled from the pursuing Dholes, but unable to determine the sex/age composition. The Blue Sheep scattered, some
heading up the scree slope (which I estimated c. 50°) and over the ridge out of my view, pursued by some of the Dholes. Other Blue Sheep continued across the slope, and one adult female remained stationary while the commotion passed her by. All was quiet for a few seconds, and I assumed that the pursuit, if any, was continuing beyond the ridge opposite me, out of sight.

However, a few moments later, I observed two Dholes running down the slope, around 200 m from where I had last observed them, and ahead of them were three male Blue Sheep. During the chase across steep talus, it appeared that the Dholes were slightly faster than the Blue Sheep. As the Blue Sheep ran down towards a particularly steep rock outcrop, 3-4 other members of the Dhole pack, of whom I had lost track, appeared below them, cutting off their escape route in ambush. The three Blue Sheep thus found themselves surrounded, with Dholes behind and ahead of them, and immediately took refuge in the very steep rock outcrop (c. 4,100 m elevation), and were shortly joined by the adult female Blue Sheep, who had remained still.

All four Blue Sheep had now perched themselves in particularly steep sections of the rock outcrop, within about 30 m of each other, in locations with overhanging rocks above and steep approaches from all sides. Six of the Dholes (all except the pup) followed them onto the rock outcrop, encircling the Blue Sheep, at times concentrated their attention on one or another, and barking at times. On about six occasions, one or two Dholes advanced toward one or another of the standing Blue Sheep, but each time the Dholes slipped or became unsteady on the extremely steep rock and retreated. At one point, a Dhole managed to advance to within c. 2 m of the head of one of the male Blue Sheep, who stared at it and stamped a front hoof vigorously. But the Dhole was prevented from attacking the Blue Sheep by a chasm that could be bridged only by jumping, which it declined to do. As in the other advances, this one resulted in retreat. The Dholes gradually slowed their advances toward the stranded Blue Sheep, each time seeming to sense that the rock outcrop was too steep to allow an attack. After about 10 minutes, all seven Dholes gradually moved away from the four Blue Sheep, most moving uphill, but remaining on the rock outcrop within c. 40 m of the Blue Sheep. As the last Dhole retreated along a ledge above one of the Blue Sheep, it dislodged a roughly 15 cm diameter rock, which sailed past one of the male Blue Sheep. The Dhole then used its muzzle to dislodge 4-5 additional rocks of similar size, each of them falling in the direction (but missing) the Blue Sheep, who did not react in any evident way. This Dhole then joined the others to rest in various flat spots on the outcrop, the closest being only about 10 m from the nearest Blue Sheep.

This standoff continued for an additional 90 minutes, most of the Dholes resting or sleeping, occasionally venturing closer to the Blue Sheep, the Blue Sheep in alert postures, tails erect, breathing heavily, and occasionally stamping a front hoof. At 1040 hrs, the female Blue Sheep began moving from her safe haven, slowly making her way off the rock outcrop toward the steep talus slope surrounding it. Her initial decision was a poor one because she ventured directly toward three of the resting Dholes, who immediately sat up and directed their attention toward her. She retreated, but continued to slowly work her way across steep sections of the rock outcrop. At about 1130 hrs (by which time the Dholes were all sleeping), the female Blue Sheep again moved off the outcrop, slowly working her way up the talus slope, whereupon two of the three male Blue Sheep followed her. These three Blue Sheep then made their way upwards, circling around the sleeping Dholes, and within a few minutes had reached the top of the ridge and disappeared, presumably to safety.

However, one male Blue Sheep remained in its refuge, where it remained for an additional six hours (I left my observation post at 1400 hrs, but when I returned at 1720 hrs, the Blue Sheep was in exactly the same position). All seven Dholes continued to sleep in various flat sections of the rock outcrop, above the Blue Sheep. At about 1730 hrs, one of the Dholes began moving, stretched, and moved toward two of the other Dholes. I observed what appeared to be some play behaviour among the three, who then moved toward where the other Dholes remained sleeping. A gradual awakening of the entire pack ensued, and within another 20 minutes, the lead animal had moved off the rock outcrop along the scree slope, in the same direction as I had noted the pack to be moving when I had first observed it, some nine hours earlier. The other six Dholes gradually followed, and by 1745 hrs all seven Dholes were well clear of the rock outcrop.

Although unsuccessful, it seems clear that the Dholes would have attacked and killed any of the Blue Sheep that lacked the ability to escape. Accounts of predation by Dholes have mostly been in forested or gentler terrain. Here, it seems that even the extremely steep and rocky terrain of the alpine desert did not constitute an insurmountable barrier for Dholes to attempt an attack. At the same time, the benefits to Blue Sheep from proximity to terrain that they (but not the Dholes) could negotiate were rendered obvious by their behaviour upon being attacked.

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3. ALBINO SAMBAR CERVUS UNICOLOR KERR

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Jaisalmer was the shikar reserve of the Maharana during the monarchy in Mewar. It is about 50 km from Udaipur city and has now been converted into a wildlife sanctuary. It is near the Jaisalmer lake.

During those days this reserve was teeming with Sambar Cervus unicolor Kerr. Maharana Fatehsingh of Udaipur once arranged a beat on the Ruthi Rani Ka Mahal hill. The population of Sambar here was so thick and dense that a number of Sambar fell off the cliffs and the hill and were killed. Thereafter, he never arranged a beat for this hill range. From this we can visualize the population of Sambar in this reserve.

In those days of monarchy, a young female Sambar was caught which was an albino. This Sambar was kept in the Udaipur zoo. But it did not survive long in the captivity. After it died, it was stuffed and kept as a specimen in the museum of the Maharana. It is now exhibited at the Archeological Museum of Udaipur situated in the City Palace. As the artefacts of the Maharana's museum were transferred to the government after Independence, the detailed record of this specimen is not available with the museum authorities.

4. BOOTED EAGLE HIERAAETUS PENNATUS (GMELIN) BUILDING WINTER NESTS

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The Booted Eagle Hieraaetus pennatus (Gmelin) is one of the smaller eagles in the Indian subcontinent known to breed in the Himalaya between March and June, and is a widespread winter visitor in the country (Ali and Ripley 1968). Observations on the unusual behaviour of nest building in their wintering range in Etawah district are described here.

On December 29, 1999, I observed a nest on a Dalbergia sissoo tree on which a pair of Booted Eagles (light phase) was roosting (26° 53' N, 79° 5'E). The nest was an untidy platform of sticks built 14 m from the ground, placed on the top of the trunk between the primary branches. The eagles were seen to forestage in the area until mid-February 2000. Photographs of the birds were shared with experienced ornithologists who confirmed the identity of the birds (R. Jayapal and M. Nair pers. comm. 2001). The tree was located beside one of the branches of the Right Wing Ganga Canal along crop fields. The area immediately adjacent to the tree was a patch of land owned and maintained by the forest department that had made mounds for tree planting, but had not yet planted the trees. Detailed descriptions of the area are published elsewhere (Sundar 2004).

On September 30, 2000, a pair of Booted Eagles, presumably the same pair, was seen to reinforce the same nest with sticks, and was seen until early February 2001. In 2001, the eagles were not sighted until October 26 when the