

# The Hirola Conservation Project

The hirola (*Beatragus hunter*) is the world's most endangered antelope, with an estimated global population size of 300-500.



In the absence of management interventions, global extinction is predicted in the next 50-100 years. Extinction would mark the first loss of a mammalian genus since the Tasmanian wolf in 1936.

Ecological knowledge gaps, weak local involvement, and political turmoil on the Kenya-Somali border

have hindered conservation of hirola since the 1970s.



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**Hirola Conservation Project**  
**National Museums of Kenya**  
**Kenya Wildlife Services**



## The Goals

In 2010, researchers initiated a field research program in Ijara, Kenya with the goal of:

- Understanding the relative roles of range quality and predation in driving demography of hirola.
- Identifying critical habitats where survival and recruitment are high, to be used as potential sites for future reintroductions.
- Promoting education and capacity building through community outreach and education.



## The Project

To better inform conservation efforts, we initiated work on the demography, habitat selection, and movement, in Ijara 2010.

Our work targets the importance of recently recognized predators and deteriorating range quality for hirola demography and movement., both of which have been identified by the Kenya Wildlife Service as critical priorities for research.



We employ GPS telemetry, and mark-resight and sight-resight analyses. GPS-telemetered animals are enabling us to generate unprecedented data on the basic

biology of this poorly-known species. In addition, we are analyzing remotely-sensed imagery to determine the collective impacts of overgrazing, fire suppression, and elephant reductions on shrub encroachment in this region.

Preliminary results suggest that hirola have declined in response to the conversion of open grasslands to shrubland, perhaps triggered by the extirpation of elephants from northeastern Kenya in the 1970's.

## Herders for Hirola

Because hirola are large, charismatic, and indicative of high-quality rangeland, the species can be utilized as both indicator and flagship species for semi-arid ecosystems in the Horn of Africa.

Remaining populations occur almost solely on pastoral lands with no formal protection and future conservation success hinges on our ability to educate and instill tolerance to local Somalis whose livestock co-occur and potentially compete with hirola.



As a synergistic effort to the research project; we also do an intensive village based education and outreach program for communities living within the hirola range. In so doing, we integrate field visits with outreach program entailing lectures, video shows, and public discussion and desnaring patrols.

