FOUR-HORNED ANTELOPE

Hand raising of orphaned wild *Tetracerus quadricornis* in captivity - a field report

Three days old fawn at bask

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group, 2017)

Mammalia
[Class of Mammals]

Cetartiodactyla
[Order of Even-toed ungulates and cetaceans]

Bovidae
[Family of Cloven-hoofed ruminants]

Tetracerus quadricornis
[Four-horned Antelope]

Species described by de Blainville in 1816

No large Indian ungulate, other than deer has adapted itself to a wider variety of forest types and environmental conditions. Major threats for Four-horned Antelope *Tetracerus quadricornis* and its habitat are mainly due to feral dogs, encroachment, extension of road network, poaching, overgrazing and water scarcity. Deers were hunted in India for meat and other purposes using snares, nets, dogs, and guns. Injured and orphaned fawns are often picked up for hand rearing, an attempt to nurse and thus save them (Putman 1990). Hand rearing is a time-consuming process that requires extensive knowledge of the animal biology.

Hand rearing of twenty days old fawn

Global Distribution: Native: India, Nepal (IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group, 2017)

Using a milk substitute that is similar to the milk composition of the hand-reared species is especially important. The success rate of hand rearing of newly born fawns that have not yet consumed milk is close to zero and that of a 1 week-old fawn is 50% (Wolfel 1993). Rao & Acharjyo (1996) addressed several health issues throughout the hand-rearing period and were overcome with veterinary assistance. The present field report describes the details of hand-raising of orphaned wild fawn.

Results and Discussion

On arrival to the Karuna wildlife rescue centre, rescued by villagers from the agriculture field near by Bukkapatnam Forest Range, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh on the evening (around 16.00hr) of 11 December 2016 was found to be healthy and the fawn allowed to suckle lukewarm fresh cow's milk four times (06:00hr, 10:00hr, 14:00hr, 18:00hr) forcefully for three days and adopted well. Later multivitamins supplemented along with milk and after a month suckling of lukewarm fresh cow's milk was reduced to three times depending on need. Feeding milk was gradually reduced and completely stopped at the end of 5th month. In order to prevent malnutrition the only way to increase the frequency of meals, which often resulted in indigestion and diarrhea which must be taken care. Thus regular veterinary examinations must be continued on daily basis.

Grown up fawn with an adult

During the hand-rearing period, the fawn was kept in a separate enclosure with access to a fenced garden. It was rarely left

Two months old hand reared fawn

alone for more than three hours at a time. From the age of one month, the antelope was encouraged to follow by routine calling and was allowed to walk freely (Gehlot 2010).

At the age of 4-6 months, the deer was gradually introduced to a group. It was necessary to restrict the deer to a fenced site to prevent the risk of predation, illegal hunting and accidents. The keeper maintained contact with the deer on a daily basis to retain the relationship that was required to be able to work with them under free-ranging conditions (Pinter 1963).

The fawn began foraging at the age of 6th week and gradually consumed a variety of locally available plants and sliced fresh vegetables and fruits. The fawn had very little contact with people besides its keeper and would not accept milk from people they did not know well. In order to ensure that they would accept milk from more than just one keeper, an additional person fed the fawn on a daily. Feeding attempts by an unfamiliar person would face active resistance and the fawn would appear to be frightened were strictly avoided.

Faeces were soft and yellowish during the first week and they gradually became harder and darker. Within 2–3 weeks, the faeces became dark-brown pellets. They began defecating independently and started practicing communal defecation and urination as a part of territorial demarcation or might be for communication purposes (David & Sharma 2009).

Introduced to other deer

The experiences indicated that hand-rearing of four horned antelope is potentially useful

tool in physiological and ecological studies. When setting up a research programme with hand-reared Four-horned Antelope, it is advisable to take into consideration the limiting factors and potential biases. This documented case can be used as a tool for carrying out a feasibility study for a conservation of endangered species by hand-raising with minimal risks. We conclude that it is possible to study hand-reared Four-horned Antelope in large habitats and to maintain a close relationship with them in their adulthood.

After six months

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