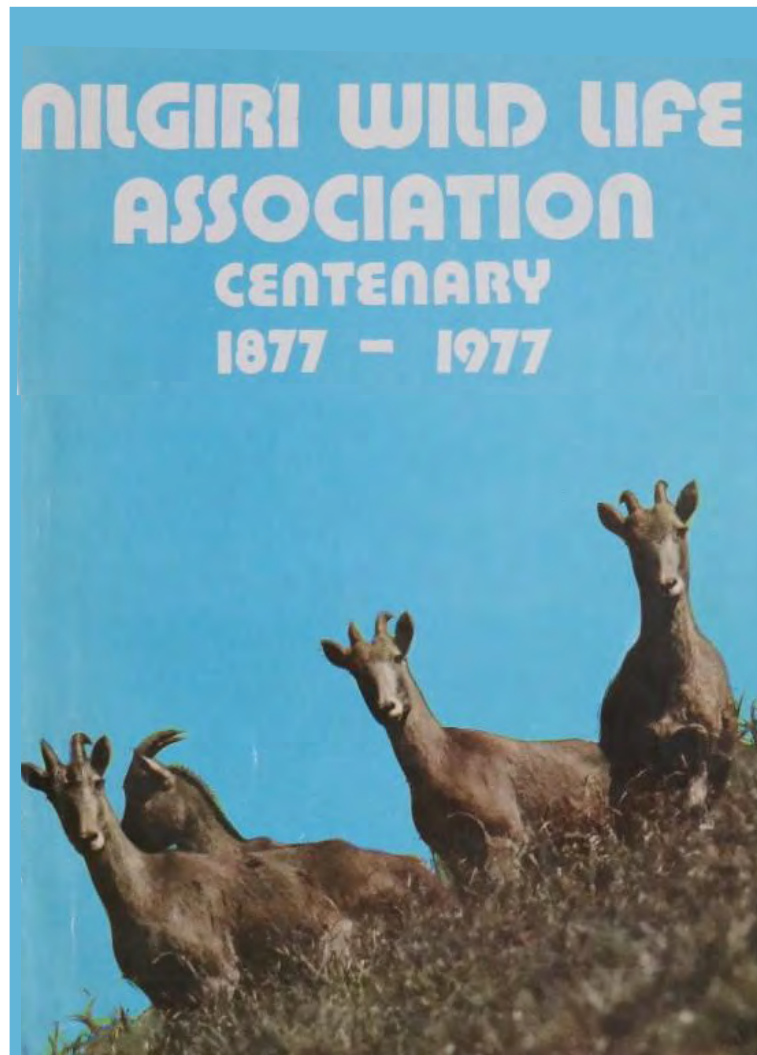


# Status of wildlife in the Nilgiris - E.R.C. Davidar

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## Preface

This article appeared in the centenary publication (1877-1977) of the Nilgiri Wildlife Association, of which E.R.C. Davidar was the Honorary Secretary at that time. The article provides important insights into the wildlife of the Nilgiris in the 1970's and earlier from the perspective of a shikari. The Nilgiris was teeming with wildlife (Fletcher 1911) when the British

colonized the hills, and unregulated hunting decimated many species, among which were the Indian Gaur (*Bos gaurus*) and Nilgiri tahr (*Nilgiritragus hylocrius*) that were abundant in the upper plateau. The tiger, elephant and other megafauna were hunted mercilessly in the lower regions of Sigur, Gudalur and Wynaad leading to drastic decline in their numbers. Legislations to protect wildlife probably came too late

as by then large extent of forests and grasslands had already been destroyed. The protection from hunting, and decline of diseases such as rinderpest and foot and mouth, and paucity of predators, could account for the resurgence of gaur populations in the upper plateau, where they share an uneasy coexistence with people. However, the Nilgiri Tahr never

recovered from its pre-British days when it probably numbered in the thousands. The elephant numbers probably plummeted during the Veerappan era beginning in the 70's and lasting until the 2000's when over 1000 elephants were presumably killed for their ivory. The Nilgai which was recorded near Mettupalayam was never seen again.

– **Priya Davidar**

### **Main Article**

On such an occasion as the Centenary of any organization, it is usual to look back to see how far it has lived upto its hopes and aspirations, take stock, and look towards its future. Since the Nilgiri Wild Life Association formed in 1877 has been intimately connected with the management of 'Game', from 1879 when the Nilgiri Game and Fish Preservation Act came into force until 1976, when the Wildlife (Preservation) Act of 1972 was enforced, it is but appropriate that the status of at least the larger forms of wildlife in the 'district' (which extends to the Bhavani river in the Coimbatore revenue district) be reviewed. It is with this object that this note was written.

### **Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)**

In his book 'Sport on the Nilgiris and in the Wynaad' (1911), F. W. F. Fletcher a planter and keen hunter in the Nilgiri-Wynaad, which is now part of the present Gudalur taluk of the Nilgiris district, recounts several successful tiger hunts between the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of twentieth century. According to him, netting a spearing of tigers by Panias was common in his area at that time. He

mentions – “still tigers promenade on the Devala road; and still the beat constables get skeered as of yore”. In the 'Guide to Shikar on the Nilgiris' (1924) “Big Bore” was more concerned with records than with the status of the tiger. But, the Rev. Edmund Bull mentions in a chapter in the same book – “There are plenty of tigers to be met with in the Nilgiris” and called Anaikatti “a regular tiger walk”.

The late Lt Col E. G. Phythian-Adams, who hunted in the Nilgiris between 1923 and 1957, in his notes 'Jungle Memories' published in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society in a series commencing in 1948 speaks of the Nilgiris, especially the plateau and Mudumalai, as a place for chance met tigers. In a note on the Association published in 1939 JBNHS he wrote – “There seems to be no decrease in their numbers either on the plateau, or in the low country, fresh animals turning up in a short time to replace those shot”. It may be noted that Sigur and Mudumalai ranges on the lower plateau (particularly the Sigur range) are generally referred to as the low country. The annual reports of the Nilgiri Wildlife Association do not, unfortunately, refer to the status of the tiger except in the

game returns, since it was not classified as “game”! Between 1912 and 1939, an average of 11 tigers were killed annually and between 1940 and 1964 (when Sigur reserve was closed to tiger shooting) the average dropped to four. (In the latter years the annual bag depended more on the tenacity of pursuit than on other considerations).

Tiger shooting was banned in the State by the Government in January 1966. The Association which had, on its own, taken various measures to prevent over shooting felt that the ban should have been preceded by adequate preparation and followed by practical and imaginative conservation measures. The sudden withdrawal of sportsmen from the scene, had an unsettling effect. The villager was left to his own devices to defend his cattle against the depredations of tigers. He, naturally resorted to the use of poison to eliminate his enemy. “Enemy” is what the tiger had become. Until then the villagers, especially those in Anaikatti, Mavinhalla and others similarly placed, had a vested interest in tigers as they made a good living taking part in beats etc. and made sure that not too many were shot. The Nilgiri tigers were extremely clever and seldom allowed themselves to get caught over “kills”. Only a few ‘game killers’ living on inaccessible slopes survived. It was the writer’s misfortune to come across the carcasses of two tigers in the Masinagudi-Sigur area, which had obviously been poisoned. No one had even bothered to remove the skins.

This writer has had a holiday cottage in Sigur, midway between Masinagudi and

Anaikatti since 1964. Thus he had the opportunity of following the fortunes of the tiger, particularly in the low country. Between 1964 and 1967 there was considerable tiger activity in the Sigur Reserve as evidenced by tracks of tigers, claw marks on trees, kills, calls and occasional sightings. Between 1968 and about two years ago (1975), tigers had vanished from the area. He also did a carnivore survey in the Mudumalai Sanctuary in 1971/72 and from this time on there has been a slow but noticeable improvement.

Had the villagers been compensated for the losses sustained in time, most of the tigers there could have been saved. The writer’s proposal to introduce a compensation scheme was accepted with much reluctance in 1969, and that too in an attenuated form covering Mudumalai Sanctuary only. After further representation, it was extended, after some years to a one km belt around the sanctuary. It was only recently that the scheme was extended throughout the state, but by then considerable damage had been done. This scheme was also not given adequate publicity, and its implementation was tardy. Except for one suspected case, there are no reports of poaching for a trophy after the ban on shooting was placed.

In the Nilgiri-Wynaad there are no tigers left, except for an occasional straggler from the Mudumalai Sanctuary where some still remain. The Masinagudi area, and the slopes get an occasional visitor, whilst Anaikatti, the home of the tiger in the

low country, has no resident population. On the plateau, in the Kundahs, (the mountains along the western edge of the plateau), tigers normally keep to the cliff line and rarely venture into the interior. The Bangitappal/Sispara areas still hold some residents. From all accounts there are a little over a dozen tigers all told, which along with those round about, are sufficient to keep the genetic pool viable.

With the loss of habitat in Kerala and in the Nilgiri-Wynaad; the western region of the Nilgiri plateau, Sigur and Mudumalai ranges have an important role to play if the tiger in this region is to be preserved.

### **Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)**

Invariably referred to as 'panther', the leopard was considered a nuisance by the early sportsman not only because of its numbers but since it interfered with the carefully laid plans to bring about the destruction of the tiger. Between 1910 and 1930 the annual average numbers of leopards killed was 23. Between 1931 and 1940 the average dropped to around 10. Between 1941 and 1966 when shooting was closed the average dropped to five. Writing in 1939 (JBNHS volume XL1, no 2) Col. Phythian-Adams states that leopards had decreased on the plateau and as a result wild pigs had increased enormously. The present writers note published in the same journal in 1968 (vol. 65, No. 2) summed up the position thus – “ There are more panthers in the low country than on the plateau but they are by no means plentiful”. The situation has not changed since. The Nilgiri-Wynaad which held numerous leopards in Fletcher's days now

holds very few. Black leopards also occur both on the plateau and in the low country, but are far fewer in comparison, and more or less confined to the Western and North Western parts of the district.

### **Sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*)**

F. W. F. Fletcher (1911) writes “In my part of the country (Gudalur taluk) the sloth bear is undubitably the rarest of all game animals. By this I do not mean to imply that he is less common than, say the tiger; on the contrary on the rocky range of hills on which my estate (Rockwood) is situated, bears are fairly numerous. But, save for the short season during which the fruit of the Atti<sup>1</sup> is ripe, the bear is nocturnal in his wanderings and his day retreat is always chosen in some remote spot. Hence it is that he is so seldom seen”.

IN 1939 Phythian-Adams reported “From the table (of game shot) sloth bears seem to be on the decrease but it is doubtful whether it is so as they are very nocturnal and have never been numerous”.

Except for the Nilgiri-Wynaad area, there are probably as many bears in the district as there were at the start of the century; may be more. They are found mostly on the slopes, including Mettupalayam slopes and in the Mudumalai-Sigur lower plateau. During the honey season in May-June they are abroad even during the day.

### **Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)**

Fletcher writes “In the year of grace 1911, it seems scarcely credible that so late as 1873 the indiscriminate slaughter of

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<sup>1</sup>*Ficus glomerata*

elephants was not only permitted in the Madras Presidency, but was encouraged by the Government by the offer of a large reward for every elephant killed; and even after this lapse of time the elephant lover must feel a pang of regret at the thought of the wholesale butchery that was perpetrated under the aegis of this deplorable system. Here in S. E. Wynaad, the slaughter was enormous and I have heard (I believe this is strictly true) one man who was then resident here was credited with the killing of three hundred elephants mostly cows and calves”.

With reference to the position in his area at the turn of the century he states –“In regard to elephant shooting, I, at one time, occupied a unique position, for over a large area in which elephants are numerous, I had the sole right to “Kill, capture and pursue them” and had I thirsted for their blood I could easily have gratified the craving”. In this part of the country, a herd may contain any number of individuals from four to forty. Possibly much larger herds exist. Always a few are to be found in the jungles at the foot of the Northern slopes while at times their numbers rise to fifty or more”.

Phythian-Adams writes in his ‘Jungle memories’ – “Thanks to the protection afforded, elephants have increased to such an extent that they have become a serious menace to the cultivator.....The movements of elephants depend largely on climatic conditions but there are always a few to be found in the jungles at the foot of the Northern slopes while at times their number rise to fifty or more”.

It was not only the Madras Elephant Preservation Act of 1873, but the vast unspoilt jungles where the elephants could roam and breed in peace that brought about such a dramatic change, since the eighteen seventies.

In the writer’s experience of the past twenty and odd years more elephants are met with in the district today than in the fifties. Some believe that this is deceptive and attribute the apparent increase to the shrinkage of the elephant’s habitat by the denudation of forests all around, particularly in Kerala and some clear felling in the district itself; especially in the Nilgiri-Wynaad. But the large number of young seen in the herds does not altogether support this theory. Even if the population as a whole in the region has not increased, there are certainly more elephants in the district now than there were, say, fifty years ago. Elephants used to visit the plateau but rarely. Nowadays such visits are nothing unusual and there are a few permanent residents. Every year half a dozen or more people are killed in the district, but proscribed as ‘rogues’ of which one was shot. But some half a dozen or more elephants are found dead in the jungle each year, some from gunshot wounds.

### **Gaur (*Bos gaurus*)**

If FWC Fletcher’s accounts are to be believed the Nilgiri-Wynad must have been teeming with gaur at the turn of the century.

Phythian-Adams writes in his ‘Jungle Memories’ – “It was not until I settled down in the Nilgiris that I found how easy it can

be to bag one of these grand animals. They are of course no longer found on the plateau except for a very occasional wanderer, but in the low country they are so numerous that seldom a day passes without seeing them”.

Writing in 1939, he states, “.....they are now confined to the low country on the North and West where they are definitely on the increase. There was a serious outbreak of rinderpest in the Mudumalai forest in 1909 affecting both bison and sambur and the numbers of the former were so depleted that their shooting was prohibited in 1912, for five years. In 1929 there was again a small outbreak of disease in the same forest but only a few animals died and since then with the exception of a single unconfirmed case of foot and mouth disease the herds have remained healthy”.

Besides the areas mentioned by the above writers, gaur also occur in the southern and eastern slopes, on either side of Mettupalayam, though not in great numbers, and have maintained their strength over the years.

There was a serious outbreak of rinderpest in 1968, in the Mudumalai and Sigur ranges wiping out most of the gaur in the area; in terms of numbers – hundreds of animals. For the next five or six years it was a rare sight to see a gaur in the area, except on the upper slopes. In the last two years gaur have reappeared especially in Mudumalai which could be considered their home. But the danger from disease is ever present, as decrepit and diseased cattle, enroute to slaughter houses, are driven through

the area every week. Scrub cattle in the thousands, including many unhealthy ones are grazed in the low country jungles. As far as the Nilgiri-Wynaad is concerned, much of the Gaur country of Fletcher has been cut up and developed and is no longer an ideal habitat of this forest loving animal. A few herds still occur on the slopes and in the forest adjoining the Mudumalai sanctuary.

### **Nilgiri Tahr (*Nilgiritragus hylocrius*)**

“Not a great many years ago, ibex (sic) could generally be found all along the precipitous rocks forming the line of ghats skirting the hills from Rungaswamy’s peak (Kil Kotagiri) to Makoorty, Sispara and Mail-koondah. Now they are with difficulty found at some more favoured spot than others” – ‘Hawkeye’ (Gen R. Hamilton) in ‘Game’ (1876).

“In former years this animal was plentiful in certain favoured localities in these hills.....These unfortunate animals have been persistently persecuted and greatly reduced in numbers. The incessant harrying they are subjected to will certainly lead to their absolute extinction unless the game laws, since adopted and promulgated save them from this fate” Lt. Col. A. J. O. Pollock in ‘Sporting days in Southern India’ (1894).

F.W.F. Fletcher notes – “ In former days – the halcyon days of sport on the Nilgiris – “Ibex” (as the animal is commonly referred to in these parts) were found in very large herds, an assembly of even one hundred being not uncommon according to accounts of old-time sportsmen.

But owing to incessant persecution the numbers were thinned at such a rapid rate that at one time the ibex stood in imminent danger of extermination. The Nilgiri Game and Fish Preservation Act of 1879 did much to avert this calamity; the absolute prohibition of ibex shooting, which followed a few years later, did more. Under this salutary legislation there was such a steady increase in the herds, that in 1908 it was found possible to permit the shooting of one 'saddle back' (as old males with saddle marks on the back are called) under each licence issued in a season. I need hardly add, a saddle back does not fall to the lot of every sportsman. The largest herd I ever saw was at Bettmund on a glorious morning in 1890, and they numbered twenty-nine".

In a note on Game preservation published in the JBNHS in 1927 Phythian-Adams wrote "The total of the herds in the Kundhas cannot now fall much below 400". In 1939 he estimated their number at 500. But no systematic enumeration appears to have been undertaken to arrive at these figures.

In 1963 and 1975 the writer conducted, through proper census operations, and a summary of the 1975 count is given below:-

Altogether 334 animals were counted. In spite of favourable conditions, it is possible that a hundred or more tahr remained out of site, and unenumerated along the cliffs. The total tahr population was estimated at 450 compared to 292 and 400 for the 1963 census.

Some overlapping in the classification is not ruled out. No attempt was made to classify Light brown male and Adult female separately as this would have slowed down the work considerably. From the samplings it may be stated that the ratio between males and females was 1:3. The Glenmorgan herd which numbered around 30, and which enjoyed protection for many years appears to have disappeared. The tahr on the isolated cliffs of the Northern and Eastern face of the Nilgiris, which were not legally hunted also appear to have disappeared long ago.

Poaching is expected to increase with the opening up of the Silent Valley in Kerala. Banning tahr shooting is not the answer as game licence holders perform a useful function by their very presence in the area. Forest staff rarely penetrate into the interior. Every case of tahr poaching that has been detected was on the initiative of licence holders. The movements of the game

Area	Saddle-back	Dark brown male	Light brown male and adult female	Yearling ≈1-2 years	Young Upto 9 months	Total
Mukerti	2	3	22	9	9	45
Western Catchment	2	4	24	6	6	42
Nadgani/Sispara	8	15	130	23	31	207
Bangitappal	3	3	26	2	6	40
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>334</b>

licence holder, unlike those of the poacher can be watched and controlled as the entry and exit points are known. Taking all these factors into consideration a half-yearly bag limit of 2 saddle backs (which are old males, a majority of them past breeding) was suggested. This was accepted by the Association. However, since then the control has passed into the wild life department. As the Nilgiri tahr has been placed in Schedule II of the Wildlife Act, a special game licence from the Chief Wild Life Warden is required to pursue it. None has been issued in the last two years, and so no patrolling was done.

One of the worst problems that the tahr faced was the extension of wattle and eucalyptus plantations into their habitat, in spite of protests by the Association. Fortunately most of these have failed because of the high winds on the exposed slopes of the Kundhas and lack of depth of soil.

### **Sambur (*Cervus unicolor*)**

Fletcher reported on Nilgiri-Wynaad – “Living as I do in Sambur country..... any afternoon or morning I cam across a dozen sambur within a few hundred yards of my bungalow, while frequently they came into my verandah in their nightly rambles”. “During the reminder of our trip (Rockwood and Needle rock peaks) we saw several more stags with heads of about the same size (33”); but as I had redeemed my promise of sport I did not go after them”.

The slaughter of sambur on the tea and coffee plantations in the name of protecting young shade trees and nurseries was

immense as seen from various reports. Phythian-Adams in his “Jungle Memories” writes- “Though a fair number are to be found in the low country the great majority on the plateau where they have so increased in spite of the ravages of tigers, panthers and wild dogs that it has become necessary to have a few hinds shot annually”. The ban on shooting of hinds was reimposed shortly afterwards. The present low horn limit of 28” was fixed in 1932 in order to permit the shooting of old stags whose horns were going back and whose retention was undesirable. But a glance at the table shows how few mature animals are shot annually, though it must be remembered that the present bag limit is two against three previously”.

Between 1912 and 1923 over 40 stags were killed on the average annually. But then there must have been a dozen or more stags to each one shot. The average annual bag dropped to less than 20 between 1924 and 1945. Thereafter until 1975 the average bag remained at around 10. In some years as few as 3 were accounted for.

The Nilgiri-Wynaad is no longer the sambur paradise it was in Fletcher’s days. The reason for this is not far to seek – development, both authorized and unauthorized. But the area, particularly the wooded slopes, still carry a reasonable sambur population. There is no appreciable fall in the number of sambur in the low country in spite of the set back following the 1968 rinderpest epidemic which affected the sambur also.

Reporting on the status of wildlife in the Nilgiris in 1968, the present writer noted – “Alas the position of the sambur on the plateau is far from satisfactory. Except in a few pockets where there are between half a dozen to a dozen animals, the sambur is scarce. Estate labour with dogs killed quite a few. But poachers could not have accounted for all the missing sambur, for poaching never got out of hand in the Nilgiris as in other districts. How they could have disappeared even from areas where no poaching took place is a mystery. However, it is comforting to know that there are more sambur in the plateau today (1968) than there were a few years ago. But, unfortunately, as soon as there is an appreciable increase, wild dogs invade the plateau from the low country in numbers and bring down the population. In 1960 there was such an invasion that in one bay of the Pykara lake alone 14 sambur skulls and a jumble of bones were recovered. It is hoped that the new wattle plantations of the forest department on the plateau will provide more cover for the sambur and help it, to some extent, to make a come back”.

Sambur have increased on the plateau particularly in the Bangitappal/Sispara area. On the slopes also, there are more now than there were some ten to fifteen years ago.

### **Cheetal (*Axis axis*)**

Fletcher writes of Nilgiri-Wynaad – “Light open forest on the banks of streams, interspersed with glades of short grass, is the country the dappled deer love and hence they abound in the jungles at the

foot of the northern face of the Nilgiri plateau, and below the Western Ghats of Malabar where their special taste in the matter of habitat is suited to a nicety”.

“On several occasions prospecting work has taken me to a place at the foot of the hills, where the whole country is alive with spotted deer. ....I have come across herd after herd, which together must have numbered fifty at least”. (which is not a large number in Masinagudi for instance). An idea of Nilgiri-Wynaad cheetal is gained when Fletcher’s largest head measured only 32”. Big Bore in his “A guide to shikar on the Nilgiris’, calls Masinagudi the home of the spotted deer. They were said to be fairly plentiful in Mudumalai also.

Phythian-Adams reported in 1927 – “very numerous in the low country, but much persecuted by wild dogs and patta land shooters”. In his 1939 report he writes – “cheetal are confined to the low country, their favourite centre being the Mudumalai and Benne forests. In spite of the appalling ravages of wild dogs and to a lesser degree of tigers and panthers, large herds of 30 to 40 may be seen including a number of fine stags. The way in which cheetal heads have improved under careful system of preservation is shown by the following instance. Writing in 1880 a well known local sportsman and taxidermist refers to a head of 32 ½” which had recently obtained as the largest shot to date in South India. Nowadays such horns are common in the Nilgiris and heads of 34” and 35” can be obtained without difficulty, while several over 37” have been shot in recent years, the best being two of 38” bagged in 1916

and 1926”.

The average annual bag was 22 between 1912 and 1939. Between 1940 and 1959 the average dropped to 13. Between 1960 and 1974 the average shot up to 38 stags. In his 1968 report the writer stated – “This species has recorded a spectacular increase. Herds of one hundred or more are not uncommon – the concentration has moved east from Mudumalai of Phythian-Adams’ days) and large herds are found around Masinagudi and Anaikatti”. Fifty five (55) stags were accounted for in 1968, the largest number shot in any one year in the last 10 years. It was even considered that some old does should be allowed to be shot. But after the rinderpest epidemic the deer population declined and wild dogs increased. However, in the last 2 years there has been a marked improvement in their status in the low country. But in the Nilgiri-Wynaad their position is precarious. There are some herds on the Mettupalayam slopes.

### **Muntjak (*Muntiacus muntjak*)**

It is commonly known as the jungle sheep in the Nilgiris. Fletcher writes – “Both on the Nilgiris and in the Wynaad the muntjak is very common. In the Wynaad he feeds at all hours of the day at the edge of some cover in which he can retreat instanter”. Phythian-Adams in his 1927 note wrote –“are sufficiently numerous and call for no remarks”. In 1939 he reported –“are found mostly on the plateau but they occur also in the Nilgiri-Wynaad. The number allowed on the licence was reduced from 6 to 4. -----their position is satisfactory”. In 1968 the present writer reported on the

position of the barking deer thus – “is more partial to the plateau than the low country. The conditions on the plateau are so unsettled because of work on the Kundah hydro electric project and the extensive wattle plantations of the forest department that these deer venture out of the security of the sholas only late in the evenings thus making it difficult to assess their status. The bag limit has been further reduced to 2”.

Although the conditions have more or less returned to normal on the plateau, but because of extensive wattle and bluegum plantations it is difficult to sight this animal, unlike in the old days when there were more open grasslands. They are holding their own on the slopes wherever cover is available. A pure albino specimen was shot on Doddabetta in 1938.

### **Four horned antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*)**

Phythian Adams wrote in 1939 – “is found chiefly at the foot of the northern slopes and in the broken ground covered with light jungle along the edge of the Mysore ditch, as the great rift of the Moyar river is called. They are few in number and seldom shot”. In ‘Jungle Memories’ he states – “They are extremely wide awake little animals and it is not easy to get within sporting range, while the fact that under the rules only males may be shot makes it still more difficult to bring one to bag”.

The Association recommended the closure of the shooting of this antelope and since 1955 the ban has been effective. Some have been seen near Masinagudi

(Manradiar Avenue). There does not appear to be any improvement in the status of the animal and it continues to be scarce.

### **Blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra*)**

Phythian-Adams wrote in 1927 – “Were closed to shooting from 1923 to 1926 and are still not numerous, but sufficiently so to allow the inclusion of one on the licence for those who care to shoot so poor a trophy”. In 1939 he reported – “For several years their shooting was closed and there seems to be little doubt that they need renewed protection, as they suffer severely at the hands of patta land shooters and from wild dogs”.

Blackbuck shooting was again closed, this time permanently from 1948. Between 1930 and 1948 the total number of bucks bagged by licence holders was 18 only. Blackbuck have completely disappeared from their old haunts in Kargudi, Moyar and Masinagudi. However on the district border, between Bhavanisagar and Thengumarada they are now plentiful.

### **Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*)**

Phythian-Adams wrote in ‘Jungle Memories’ – “In the Nilgiris 25 years ago there was a solitary bull near Kallar at the foot of the Mettupalayam Ghat, and at my suggestion the Nilgiri Game Association afforded him and his kin full protection. But no doubt he has passed on long ago and I never heard of any other in the district”.

### **Mouse deer (*Tragulus meminna*)**

“Every year a few are shot in small game beats” wrote Phythian-Adams. Between 1958 and 1964 mouse deer shooting was

closed. Few beats were organized in the last twelve years and as a consequence very few mouse deer were killed by licence holders. Being nocturnal they are seldom seen except after a heavy shower when it is possible to see them on the margins of roads in the low country and on the northern and western slopes, at night. There does not appear to be any change in their status since the beginning of this century, except in places where forests themselves have disappeared.

### **Hyaena (*Hyaena hyaena*)**

“Except for an occasional straggler on the plateau they are confined to the dry belt at about 3000ft elevation round Anaikatti where they are common”, Phythian-Adams stated. Now they are by no means common even around Anaikatti. It is possible that their numbers came down when cattlemen poisoned tiger kills. However, their status has improved as compared to, say, five years ago as seen from their tracks.

### **Wild dogs (*Cuon alpinus*)**

Fletcher wrote of the wild dog – dhole – “crafty, untiring, cruel and relentless as fate, the wild dog is the curse of the country”. “This pest, which unfortunately is very numerous in the Wynaad..... Big bore advised “The wild dog should never be spared but shot on sight”.

In his 1927 note Phythian-Adams wrote “Up till 1923 a reward of Rs. 25.00 was paid for every wild dog killed in the area of which N. G. A. gave Rs. 15.00, Government contributing the balance. The results were satisfactory in that some 40 to

50 were destroyed annually. Unfortunately the adjoining districts did not cooperate, and skins of dogs shot outside the area were brought in, in such numbers that the N.G.A. in 1923 was forced from lack of funds to discontinue the reward. In 1926 it was decided to renew the N.G.A. reward (Rs. 10/-)". This was raised to Rs. 20/-. Bounty was paid until 1976 when the Wildlife (Protection) Act was enforced.

In 1939 Phythian-Adams wrote – "The marked variation in the number of wild dogs killed from year to year, is due partly to the reason already given but also doubtless to the periods of decrease and increase to which these animals are liable. Whether such decreases are due to disease is not known but certainly some of the wild dogs killed in 1937 were in a very mangy condition, and a number were found dead, probably from distemper in 1893-94, sometimes as many as 3 and 4 in one spot".

In 1949 in his series "Jungle Memories" he wrote – "Wild dogs are resident in the Anaikatti area and have their breeding places there. They will not as a rule be found at Mudumalai and Benne except during the dry months". Phythian-Adams was of the view that long grass is an impediment to hunting; while affording cover to the deer the sharp grass blades cut up their pads.

In 1968 the present writer reported – "This animal seldom takes up residence on the plateau. Some years they do not visit the plateau at all. They are numerous in the low country and do considerable damage

living mostly on young deer". Three years ago a pair bred near Pykara and some packs were seen in the low country have taken to preying on domestic cattle, mostly calves, regularly. There do not appear to be residents in the Nilgiri-Wynaad. Their population is subject to fluctuations, and distemper seems to be the main cause. In 1965/66 there was such an outbreak.

Following it, the bounty on the wild dog's head was withdrawn for 4 years. Dhole recovered from the set back in 2 years. To the dismay of the villagers in the low country wild dogs which have been considered vermin all along are now placed in Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, requiring a special game licence for their pursuit which has not been issued in the past 2 years. Some control on their numbers especially during the years the dhole population is on the increase, is necessary if people are not to take the law into their own hands and devise their wholesale destruction.

### **Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*)**

In 1951 Phythian-Adams wrote in "Jungle Memories" – "On the Nilgiri plateau they do great damage to the potatoes which form the main crop of the district and at one time the Government used to pay Rs. 5/- on each pig killed".

In 1968, the present writer reporting on the status of wildlife in the District wrote – "The pig population fluctuates. For some years they go on increasing then for some unknown reason their numbers go down". They are plentiful at the time of writing.

### **Small game – Jungle fowl etc.**

In 1968, the writer wrote – “There are fewer jungle fowl on the plateau today chiefly because the natural sholas are either being destroyed or replaced by bluegum or wattle plantations. Some of the famous wood-pigeon sholas have vanished. So far as the winter visitors namely woodcock and snipe are concerned there has been no appreciable change. But with the exodus of the resident European sportsmen who were chiefly interested in small game and practiced beating for small game, there are fewer pursuers of game birds now. In the low country hare and jungle fowl have increased as compared to a few years ago. Peafowl have registered a larger increase”.

The pressure on small game is much less as compared to the first half of this century. Very few, if any, small game beats are organized these days. Jungle fowl are on the increase in the plateau. In the low country their population is subject to fluctuations. A few years ago when bamboo flowered extensively in the low country, there was a big increase in the number of jungle fowl. Since then there has been a drop in their population.

Area-wise the Gudalur area (‘Nilgiri-Wynaad’ is no longer used to refer to the area) has suffered the most loss. Forests have been cleared for cultivation and extension of tea and coffee plantations. In the transition from the Janmam system of land tenure obtaining there to the ryotwari tenure, there have been large scale encroachments followed by denudation of forests. Besides, except for a few privileged planters like Fletcher

and others who resided in the area, the ordinary licence holder seldom penetrated the area and it therefore remained, for all practical purposes, outside the influence of the Association and to a lesser extent the jurisdiction of the Forest Department because the bulk of the forests there were private property. Further loss of wildlife habitat may be expected when the Pandiar-Punampuzha Hydro-Electric project is taken up for execution.

On the whole the wildlife position is quite satisfactory, and could be considered very good indeed when compared to areas, which set out with a comparable stock of game as the Nilgiris one hundred years ago.

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