

New locality record for Southern Blackbuck (Mammalia: Artiodactyla: Bovidae) in Tamil Nadu, India

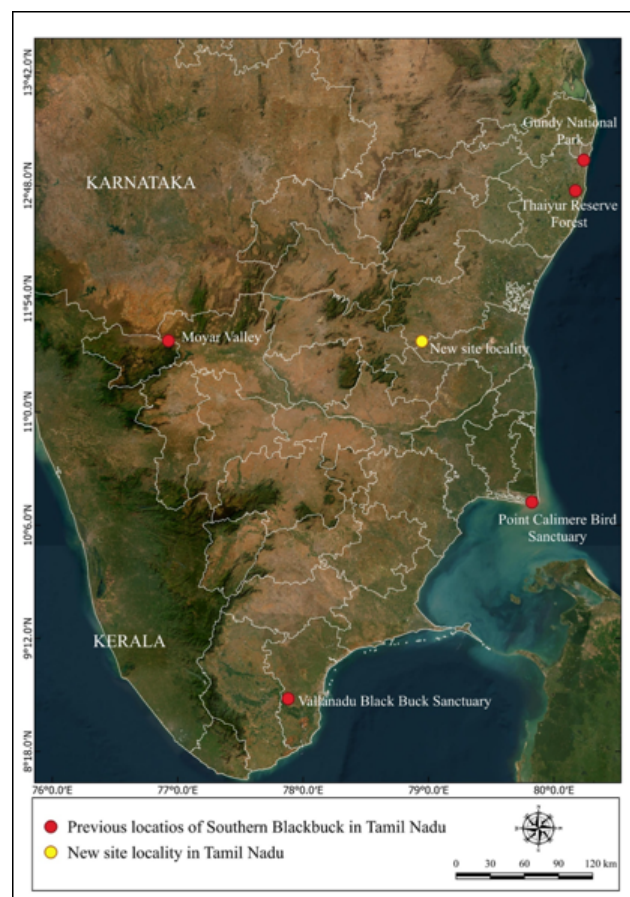
The Blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra*), a graceful, medium-sized antelope, is native to India's open landscapes. It thrives in grasslands, dry thorn scrub, sparsely wooded forests, and agricultural fringes across several Indian states - including Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal (Castello 2016).

However, increasing human activity and land-use changes such as reforestation, expansion of irrigated agriculture, and urban sprawl have severely impacted its habitat, contributing to a notable decline in population (Daniel & Arivazhagan 2008; Mahato et al. 2010). As a result, the species is protected under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which affords it the highest level of legal protection. Additionally, it is listed in Appendix III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) to curb illegal international trade.

Taxonomically, the genus *Antelope* has been classified into four geographically distinct subspecies: *Antelope cervicapra cervicapra* in Northern India, *Antelope cervicapra centralis* in Central India, *Antelope cervicapra rajputanae* in Western India and *Antelope cervicapra rupicapra* in Southern India (Vinay Kumar & Kumara 2022). The southern blackbuck (*A. c. rupicapra*) is predominantly found in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Notable populations exist in protected areas such as the Vallanadu Black Buck Sanctuary (Prashanth et al. 2016), Point Calimere Wildlife and Bird Sanctuary (Arandhara et al. 2020; Baskaran et al. 2016), and Guindy National Park (Sankar Raman et al. 1995). They are also recorded in the Moyar Valley

(Rathore 2017) and in smaller numbers within the Thaiyur Reserved Forest, part of the Chengalpattu Forest Division (Narasimmarajan & Thomas 2014).

We report a new site record of Blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra*) from the Krishnapuram Reserved Forest (11.563224, 78.946958), located within the Villupuram Forest Division, Tamil Nadu. This marks a new site record for the species in this region. On 26 January 2023, at approximately 1640 h a herd of seven Blackbuck was observed, comprising one adult male and six adult females. The area is characterized by southern dry mixed thorn scrub forest, interspersed with plantation patches. A brief conversation with a local herder revealed





New site locality (Krishnapuram Reserved Forest, Villupuram Forest Division) and the previously known locations of Southern Blackbuck distribution in Tamil Nadu, India. A herd of Southern Blackbuck sighted in Krishnapuram Reserved Forest. © Aravind Aathi.

that poaching continues to pose a major threat to this population. Additionally, the presence of grazing livestock may not only lead to competition for food resources but also pose a risk of disease transmission to the Blackbuck.

Further ecological assessments and long-term monitoring are essential to understand the population dynamics here. Such efforts would be instrumental in framing targeted conservation strategies to safeguard this remaining population of southern Blackbuck in the Krishnapuram Reserved Forest.

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Citation: Kothandapani, R., S. Vimalraj, B.M. Krishnakumar, P. N. Ponmudi, L. Maniezhilan & A. Athi (2025). New locality record for Southern Blackbuck (Mammalia: Artiodactyla: Bovidae) in Tamil Nadu, India *Mammal Tales* #126, In: *Zoo's Print* 40(8): 09–10.