

## The Antelopes Of South Africa - Enduring and Prolific, Though Underrated by Most

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We look at the antelopes of Southern Africa. Though antelopes do not exude the sexy aura of the big five, they are very successful and are fully paid up members of the African wilderness...



The Impala

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## **1. The Antelopes Of South Africa - Enduring and Prolific, Though Underrated by Most**

The antelope family is one of the largest in the animal kingdom. Though antelopes do not exude the sexy aura of the big five- lion, elephant, buffalo, leopard and rhino; they are very successful and are fully paid up members of the African wilderness. Some species are very prolific such as the impala, of which an estimated 100,000 can be found in South Africa's Kruger Park alone.

But they are not immune to the human generated changes in habitat underway in most of Africa. The roan and sable antelopes, for example, are considered endangered in the limited ranges they are forced to live in today. The blue antelope, a close cousin of the roan vanished in the eighteenth century, making it the first large mammal to go extinct in historical times. On a daily basis, antelopes are preoccupied in negotiating life alongside mortal enemies that include: man, cheetahs, jackals, lions, hyenas, leopards and hunting dogs.

Most people tend to underrate antelopes, in comparison with other bigger or stronger animals. But the bushman who is so well attuned to the rhythms of the natural world has discerned subtle qualities in the eland- the largest of Africa's antelopes. This animal has a special place in his spiritual life and he indeed believes it can connect him to God. It is taken as an animal endowing peace, well-being, healing and prosperity. The eland is almost invariably represented in bushman rock art throughout southern Africa.

In Africa, antelopes come in up to 11 tribes and 75 species. South Africa alone hosts 29 antelope species, more than anywhere else in Africa. All antelopes are herbivores, hooved and tend to chew the cud. Another defining characteristic is the horns- carried by at least males of all species and by females in 43 of the 75 African species. Horns consist of an outer sheath composed mainly of keratin over a bony core of the same shape, which grows from the frontal bones.

Keratin, a tough horny substance, is also the main constituent of hooves, nails, claws, hair, scales, and feathers. Horns emerge gently from an epidermal layer surrounding the bony core; if broken or cut off they do not regenerate. Horns are the God-given weapons through which males of all species use to compete for dominance and reproductive success. But they are also present in females of at least 43 species in Africa. They are however generally smaller and invariably thinner and weaker in females.

Like other male secondary sex characteristics, the horns' degree of development reflects on the state of male competition. And so it is that they are no more than

simple spikes in the monogamous duikers and dwarf antelopes. But they come huge and elaborate in the highly polygamous species like impala, sable and kudu that have to fight aggressively for an encounter with females that assures perpetuation of their bloodline.

Antelopes show a marked variation in size- ranging from the 1.5 kg and 20cm high royal antelope to the 950 kg and 178cm high eland. The colour of their jackets range from off- white as for the Arabian oryx to black in the black wildebeest, but most are dressed in shades of brown. The eyes are laterally placed with horizontally elongated pupils, which provide good rear view. The females have a single or double pair of mammary glands.

In terms of distribution, Africa is said to be the land of antelopes; only two tribes of antelopes occur outside the continent. In this article we shall look at a few species derived from the more than 6 tribes that thrive in Southern Africa.

Among the small antelopes, the common duiker represents the duiker tribe- technically known as cephalophini. They have long legs and flat backs and relatively large eyes. The horns are upright and appear only in males. Duikers live in forest and dense bush, where they browse on leaves, twigs, fruits, flowers and seeds. They sometimes spice their diet with small birds, caterpillars and lizards. The adult duiker reaches only up to 20 kg. This makes the duiker vulnerable to eagles- which otherwise are unable to prey on the bigger antelopes.

The dwarf antelope's -which learned people refer to as Neotragini, have about three species secluded in Southern Africa. These are the steenbok, the klipspringer and kirk's dik dik. The steenbok is a small reddish antelope with big round ears, small tail and slender long legs and well-shaped hindquarters. They are well distributed in the whole of Southern Africa –from south of Zambezi to southern Angola, and not forgetting the Kalahari along the major rivers.

The steenbok inhabits open country, which includes grasslands and scattered bushlands. It feeds on the leaves and shoots of a wide variety of low shrub and trees, seeds and fruits; and at a tender age can also feed on grass. Steenboks are territorial and like most small antelopes are largely monogamous. They are however more likely to be found singly than in pairs. They are largely nocturnal and spend most of the day under grassy cover.

The Kirk's dik dik is another arid antelope. It has a pointed and mobile snout and hairy muffle with slit like nostrils, large eyes and prominent erectile crest. They weigh an average of 5-6 kg and the horns are ridged and slant backwards. They live in a variety of habitats, provided there is good cover, but generally avoid tall

grass that may obstruct their view. They feed mostly on the leaves, shoots and fruits of most edible plants within reach.

The dik dik's extremely narrow muzzle and incisor row, combined with their small body size enables them to select small food items. They greatly benefit from disturbances caused by larger animals like elephant and giraffe, which may drop off branchlets from the top of trees. They are territorial, and live in closely associated monogamous pairs.

The Klipspringer, another variety of small antelope lives on rocky areas and cliffs. Their hooves are well adapted to steep and rocky terrain –a refuge from predators and food source. They weigh up to 14kg and are well built with big hindquarters. They are well distributed in the Eastern Africa right down to the tip of South Africa.

Due to their unique habitat, Klipspringers have a niche diet of shrubs and the succulent plants that grow in rocky areas. They will also tuck in to leaves, new shoots, berries and fruits. Like most antelopes, they are territorial and live in closely associated pairs. Territory size depends on rainfall and food distribution.

The gazelles are one of the largest antelope tribes with up to 19 species. This tribe enjoys the widest distribution, ranging from South Africa, across Asia, Siberia and China. They are slender medium sized antelopes built for speed, with long, evenly developed limbs, a level back and long neck. Both sexes except in a few species like the gerenuk have horns-, which are strongly ridged and S-shaped.

The Springbok is the gazelle's principal representative in Southern Africa, where it is found in most parks in the region. They have a distinctive dorsal skin fold containing erectile white hair. They are mostly associated with their joyous jumping displays, especially in celebration of the rains. Springboks are prolific sprinters and can reach speeds of up to 80 km/h. The springbok is well honoured in South Africa, and it is indeed the national symbol. The South African national rugby team is proudly named after this agile antelope.

The springbok has a considerable habitat tolerance and is the most abundant plain antelope in the arid lands of southern Africa. However it hardly thrives in mountains and rocky hills and avoids woodlands and tall, dense vegetation. It is a mixed feeder -in the sense of being both a grazer and a browser. It grazes on long tender grasses and browses on low shrubs and succulents. They average 40 kg in body weight though some reaching a mass of 59 kg are on record in Namibia.

Another antelope tribe of Southern Africa is the reduncini, of which members are reedbucks, kob and waterbuck. The reedbuck is the most common in the region, especially the mountain reedbuck and common reedbuck. The reduncini is a close-knit tribe with only 2 genera and about 8 species -of which 6 are geographically paired. Thus the waterbuck, lechwe and kob are so genetically close that in captivity they interbreed and produce viable hybrids.

Reedbucks are medium sized and have a yellow-to-grey-to-brown coat with a round bare spot below each ear, white underparts and bushy tail. The horns are found in males only and have a forward facing hook design. Reedbucks fall between solitary and gregarious territorial social systems. The common reedbuck lives in monogamous pairs whereas the mountain reedbuck gathers in small herds of an average of 6 animals.

Another southern Africa antelope in this tribe is the rhebok. This medium-sized animal has a long neck, bulbous nose, long narrow ears and upright spike like horns, which are found only in males. They exhibit short, rabbit like fur with varying shades of grey and legs with a dark stripe on the lower front sides. They are found only in South Africa and typically occur in grassland habitats extending to the coastal belt of the Cape region up to almost sea level.

The rhebok inhabits grasslands and scrub savannah and is a mixed feeder that stays on the higher slopes during the rains and moves to the lower slopes of grasslands when it dries out. They are gregarious and territorial and herds consist of 1- 15 females and young ones and a single adult male. Females voluntarily remain in a harem within a single territory, giving chosen males an exclusive family group.

The other key antelope tribe is the horse antelope, technically known as hippotragini. These are usually large antelopes with horse-like body formation. Their leading representative in southern Africa is the oryx- a large level-backed antelope with short neck, deep chest and long limbs. The males are heavier than females and have thicker necks and longer horns.

The oryx is the most perfectly desert-adapted large mammal, and is capable of living in waterless habitats. Only very few other hoofed animals survive in such habitats. The African species include the Beisa oryx, mostly found in northern East Africa; the Fringe-eared oryx of southern East Africa and the Gemsbok, exclusively found in southern Kalahari.

The Nyala is another unique species whose distribution is confined to southern Africa. It belongs to the antelope tribe called tragelaphines, which includes the bushbuck, kudu and eland. They have spiral horns with vertical stripes and the males are markedly different from females in body form and structure. The

males are far larger than females- reaching up to 114 kg, while females can only attain 58 kg.

The Nyala's preferred habitat is riverside thickets, dense brush and the fringes of forest. They are almost entirely confined to the Lowveld of the southern savannah closely corresponding to the area of the Mozambique coastal plain. The most popular places to see them are Hluhluwe Reserve and Kruger National Park.

The kudu is especially noted for its spectacular spiral horns, which give the animal a rather solid appearance. In the greater kudu, horns can reach a length of 72 inches. In parts of southern Africa, the horns are used as musical instruments and symbolic ritual objects. If you see the kudu's horns, you will understand why some cultures take them as a symbol of male potency.

The eland is the largest of Africa's antelopes. They can rise to 178 cm at the shoulder, and a really hefty one can reach 950 kg. Both male and female carry horns- the males can reach an impressive 50 inches. They can live in semi desert, miombo woodlands, grasslands, and acacia savannah.

The hartebeest is another species widely found in southern Africa. Among antelopes, it is one of the fastest and most resilient runners. This gift comes in very handy, as it is rather sedentary and therefore easy to hunt. The hartebeest is relatively large, and a full grown adult reaches 160 kg. They thrive in open plains, and medium to tall grasslands. Females live in a limited home range in small groups of between 5 and 12 members; most mature males are solitary. The wildebeest and topi are similar in many ways to the hartebeest.

Your best bet of seeing most of the antelopes of southern Africa is by taking a [South Africa safari](#). On such a safari, you will of course also see the other more celebrated wildlife, which includes the big five. When traveling, remember to pack a pair of binoculars- they bring the animals closer without the usual risks. A pair of decent sunglasses is a good idea, especially if you travel to the Kalahari, where the glare can be somewhat unsettling.

Also pack photographic and video equipment to record your safari for the sake of those of your unlucky friends who may not have traveled to southern Africa. On safari, you are advised not to wear white or bright clothing to avoid exciting the animals. Light cottons and linens are adequate for summer.

To survive winter mornings and evenings, you need warmer wraps and sweaters. Women should avoid wearing scanty beachwear in rural areas, away from hotels and campsites to avoid offending locals.

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## **2. Destination Facts: South Africa**

**Full Country Name:** Republic of South Africa

**Area:** 1,233,404 sq km

**Population:** 45 million (2001)

**Capital City:** Pretoria (Administrative), Cape Town (Legislative), Bloemfontein (Judicial)

**Other Major Towns:** Johannesburg, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth

**People:** 79% Black, 10% White, 9% Mixed Race, 3% Indian descent

**Language:** 11 official languages: Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Siswati, Tshivenda and Xitsonga

**Religion:** Christian (80%), Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and traditional religions

**Government:** Republic

**Time:** GMT + 2

**Currency:** South African Rand (ZAR)

**Electricity:** 220 V/240 V AC (250 V in Pretoria), 50 Hz

**Weights and Measures:** Metric

**Economy:** Mining (gold, diamonds), finance, food processing, manufacturing, agriculture

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### **3. Travel Basics: South Africa**

#### **Health**

Visitors entering South Africa from yellow fever infected areas require yellow fever international certificate of vaccination. Certain low altitude regions in Northern Province, Eastern Transvaal (including the Kruger National Park) and north east of KwaZulu-Natal are prone to malaria. Visitors to these areas are strongly advised to take anti-malaria medication before traveling. Tap water is generally considered safe in urban areas but not so elsewhere. Bilharzia occurs in the north and east of the country where you are advised not to swim in fresh water. HIV-AIDS is prevalent in the country and due care is called for.

#### **Visas**

All visitors to South Africa require passports valid for at least 30 days after planned date of exit. For those visiting for upto 90 days no visas are required from citizens of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, United States, Switzerland and the European Union. There is also visa waiver for between 30-90 days for a few other selected countries. But visa requirements vary from time to time and you are advised to check on prevailing status well ahead of travel. Visas are not issued at South Africa border points.

#### **People & Culture**

South Africa is such a vibrant country due to the diversity of its people. There is a lot to be said for the wildlife and natural attractions of this land but you will have missed much if you have no encounters with its people. The Khoi-San (bushmen) are entitled to claim of having the deepest roots and some of their ancestors' rock and cave paintings date back 26,000 years ago. Other prominent members of this "rainbow nation" include Zulu, Tswana, Ndebele, Xhosa, Sotho, Indian, Afrikaans and those of British origin. The Zulu is one of the more vibrant of traditional black cultures and their dance and dress is quite striking.

In historic terms, apartheid has just recently been dethroned and it is not surprising that colour is still such as an important part of peoples identity. Some knowledge of English will help you get by in urban areas and almost elsewhere in the country. Beer and brandy are the popular routes to getting tipsy though many are increasingly finding South Africa's excellent wines tempting. The music scene is vibrant and groups such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo are now well known in the west. The country has so many stories to be told as the grandees who award the Nobel Prize for literature have recognized. The 2003 winner was Cape Town born J.M Coetzee, who follows in the footsteps of Nadine Gordimer winner of the prize in 1991.

## **Communications**

Telephone, fax, telegram, post and Internet services are available. Direct dialing to many countries is available at most hotels. The country code for South Africa is 27. Mobile phones are based on GSM 900 network and coverage extends to most urban areas. You can obtain a GSM card that will allow you to make international calls to any country. E-mail is accessible at Internet cafes around the country.

## **Accommodation**

The accommodation available in the popular tourist routes is equal to the needs of most. From the discerning traveler who accepts none else than 5-star luxury to the cost conscious who is happy to wake up in a plain and cosy guesthouse. Accommodation options encompass hotels, game lodges and camps, resorts, health spas, motels, guesthouses, bed and breakfasts, holiday farms, beach cottages, holiday flats and bungalows. There are also over 800 camp and caravan sites in the country. Our [South Africa Hotels](#) page allows you to make an online reservation for accommodation at some selected locations in the country.

## **Money**

The local currency is the South African Rand (ZAR). Foreign currency can be exchanged at bureaux de change, some hotels, and larger shops and restaurants. Automated foreign exchange machines and ATMs are also available at limited locations. Travelers cheques (i.e checks) are valid at banks, hotels, shops and restaurants. You get the most reasonable exchange rates for US dollar, Euro and Pound Sterling. Visa and Mastercard credit cards have the widest acceptance. American Express and Diners Club have slightly less acceptability.

## **Climate**

In general South Africa has a warm temperate climate to the delight of many sunshine-seekers. The country experiences about seven months of sunshine. The colder part of the year falls between May and August. But for such a large country there are of course variations. The coast of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Northern Province are generally hot and humid and June and July are the preferred holiday months.

Winters are generally mild except at the higher altitudes where there are occasional snowfalls to the consternation of those visitors with fixed ideas about climatic conditions in Africa. Summer can be uncomfortably hot in the Low Veld. The hotter areas include the lower Orange River valley and the Mpumalanga Lowveld. Regions in the north east of the country can get quite humid. In Cape Town region rainfall is highest in winter. Most of the rest of the country experiences the highest rainfall in the summer. Those who have come to view

game are advised to travel in winter when the grass is short and the animals are much easier to sight.

### **International Travel**

Johannesburg is fast becoming a regional hub for air travel. The country's national carrier is South African Airways (SAA). There are numerous direct and indirect flights for those traveling from Europe and North America. There are also flights from other parts of Africa, the Far East and South America. International airports in the country are: Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Bloemfontein and Port Elizabeth. As Cape Town's stature as a destination grows, there is an increasing number of direct international flights.

### **Local Travel**

The road infrastructure is good and it is easy and convenient to get around the country by car. Self-drive and chauffeur-driven rental cars are widely available. Visitors must be in possession of an international driving license. South Africa has taken after the British and driving is on the left. See our [South Africa Car Rental](#) page should you wish to hire a car.

The principal cities of Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Durban, East London, Johannesburg, Kimberley, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria are serviced by daily flights. South African Airways among other domestic carriers operates on the principal routes. Cruises offer links between the country's major ports such as Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and East London.

Rail services of varying quality link the main cities. The luxury and very pricey Blue Train offers an express service between Pretoria, Victoria Falls, Hoedspruit, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. Long-distance trains are equipped with sleeping compartments. You should reserve ahead of travel especially for overnight journeys. A number of bus operators run intercity express links using modern air-conditioned coaches.

### **Travel Insurance**

There are world-class medical facilities in South Africa. Health and the usual travel insurance are recommended.

### **What to Wear**

If you travel in summer you should pack light cottons, linens and rainwear. For winter you need warmer clothes and rainwear if you travel to the Cape region. Casual wear will be adequate for most occasions. On formal social functions however men should turn out in dinner jackets and black ties and women in full-length dresses.

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## **4. About Africa Point**

**Africapoint.com** is an Africa specialist travel agent, offering travel services through the company website -Africapoint.com and also offline. This pioneering Africa travel website has been assisting travelers make bookings online since early 1999.

The company was started in 1997 has its central reservations office strategically located in Nairobi, Kenya.

The company is supported by a network of partner offices in the leading destinations in Africa. This includes Cape Town (South Africa), Arusha, Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Cairo (Egypt), Kampala (Uganda), Victoria (Seychelles), Harare (Zimbabwe). We are members of the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA).

### **What services do we offer?**

We provide reservation services for hotels, airline tickets, rental cars, tours and safaris to the top destinations in Africa. Among the countries we are currently covering are Kenya, South Africa, Egypt, Tanzania, Seychelles, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Mauritius.

We have special discounts for most of the services we offer and some of our prices are upto 50% off standard rates. Please visit our website to view the links of all the services we offer.

### **How do we make your Africa travel planning easier?**

Ours is one of very few websites offering one-stop travel booking and information service to a number of different African countries. In addition:

- We know our destinations and our products **very well**. We are in a position to give you good advice on the best hotel, rental car, tour or safari to suit your particular requirements.
- We are committed to working to the highest industry standards. We have many our past clients who are happy to share their experiences with you. Please visit the [Client Profile & Testimonials](#) page and see what some of our clients have to say.
- Our patience is the stuff of legend! We will patiently seek to answer all your queries until you are ready to pick what is most suitable for your

needs. For high value items such as safaris we have communicated with our clients for 6 months and even longer before they are ready to buy.

Others have come back to and said: "Do you remember that tour we discussed 2 years ago? I am now ready to travel." And of course we remember. We always remember!

- Together with our partners, we are based in the African destination whose travel services we are selling. For this reason we are usually able to get you very good prices. For some products our prices are **40-50%** below standard rates.
- As members of **ASTA (American Society of Travel Agents)** we are committed to upholding **ASTA's** motto of " Integrity in Travel" and operate to those same standards you would expect from an ASTA member anywhere in the world.

One of our North American clients for whose 36 person missionary group we provided an air charter, hotel booking, safari and road transport to 2 African countries had this to say.

*"My experience with Africapoint.com was good as any service that I've received any where in the USA. Not only were they helpful before and during, but they went out of their way to also be helpful afterwards.*

*I'm using them again for an upcoming trip in November and will look forward to using them for years to come."*

In addition our membership of ASTA assures you of a **neutral and trusted** arbitrator in the event that a disagreement occurs between us.

### **What is the experience of other travelers with us?**

We continue to serve the many needs of travelers who seek our services. From straight forward single night hotel bookings to short and long term **car rental, tours and safaris** for individuals and groups, international conferences.

## **5. Forward This Report**

If you've found this report to be informative and useful please forward it to your family and friends. We're sure they will like it as much as you did!