

D-16: Some observations on the habits and behaviour of Sambar deer (*Cervus unicolor unicolor*) at Horton Plains National Park

I K Rajapakse¹, S W Kotagama¹, R A R Perera, Y N A Jayatunga²
(¹Open Univ Nawala, Nugegoda, ²Dept of Zoology, Univ of Colombo, Colombo 3)

The study of behaviour of large mammals is an important aspect in management of a national park.

As such, the behavioural patterns of sambar in terms of behavioural frequencies were studied at the Horton Plains National Park. The behavioural types such as gregariousness, temperament and alertness, daily movements (feeding, resting, trailing), water use, effects of weather on daily movement, antipredator behaviour, comfort behaviour, agonistic behaviour and bark stripping behaviour were observed. Group size and frequencies, group occurrence were also recorded.

Observations of sambar were made using 8 x 30 or 10 x 40 binoculars. All observations were made on foot. Field observations revealed that sambar come out to the grasslands for feeding after or just before sunset. Therefore most of the behavioural observations were made during this time.

Some observations were made at night with the aid of a hand held spot light. Data on group size were collected by using the spot light during night and with the naked eye during day time hours.

In respect to behaviour, each behaviour type showed specific and general differences from those recorded for the low country sambar. Behaviours such as gregariousness, antipredator behaviour, comfort behaviour, agonistic behaviour, were recorded for the first time, for Sri Lanka.

When group size was considered, the most frequently observed category in the park was that of solitary animals, comprising around 22% of the sightings. The next most frequent group size was 2 individuals. Herd size of sambar in the National Park ranged between 1 to 21 individual. Average group size of sambar at Horton plains was found to be 7.5