

and the identity of the young presents a problem. Likewise the muntjac and chital frequently become close neighbours and here again the uninitiated could frequently confuse the young in the absence of the parents.

The Muntjac also inhabits the same terrain as the Sambar (*Cervus unicolor*): in both these animals, as far as my own experience goes the newly born are not spotted. However, the young of these two could not possibly be confused because of size and texture of hair. Spotting in dense forest dwellers would tend to endanger the young and expose them more readily to predators. Without labouring the subject any further, I believe that the newly born young of the Muntjac are *unspotted*. I have not observed anything to the contrary. The photograph of two young taken at Khandala, W. Ghats in May of 1918 supports my view the young are immaculate at birth in the W. Ghats.

8, KIWI STREET,
HERETAUNGA,
NEW ZEALAND,
March 20, 1968.

CHARLES McCANN

3. THE NILGIRI TAHR, *HEMITRAGUS* *HYLOCRIUS* OGILBY

(With two plates)

The Nilgiri Tahr is found in the high hill ranges of south India, the main area being the Nilgiris, Anaimalais, and the Western Ghats south to Cape Comorin, at elevations of 4,000-8,000 feet. In the Nilgiris they are now more or less confined to the south-west edge of the Kundahs from Sispara Pass along the edge of the escarpment north to Mukurti and Nilgiri Peaks.

Here an almost sheer cliff drops 2,000-3,000 feet down from the plateau of rolling grass covered hills to the thick jungle clad valleys below. In the early morning small herds of Tahr numbering anything up to twenty, may be found grazing on the grassy slopes at the edge of the escarpment, and if left undisturbed may lie up on these hills throughout the day and continue feeding again in the late afternoon. However, if they are disturbed they will quickly move over the edge of the escarpment, scrambling and leaping down the steep gullies to lie up on some sheltered ledge below. In areas where

there is continued disturbance it is rare to find them lying on the high ground during the day. These herds consist of young males, females and kids of all ages as there is no set breeding period, the kids being dropped throughout the year. The old 'Saddlebacks' are solitary animals, preferring to feed and lie-up on their own away from the main herds, particularly during the hot season.

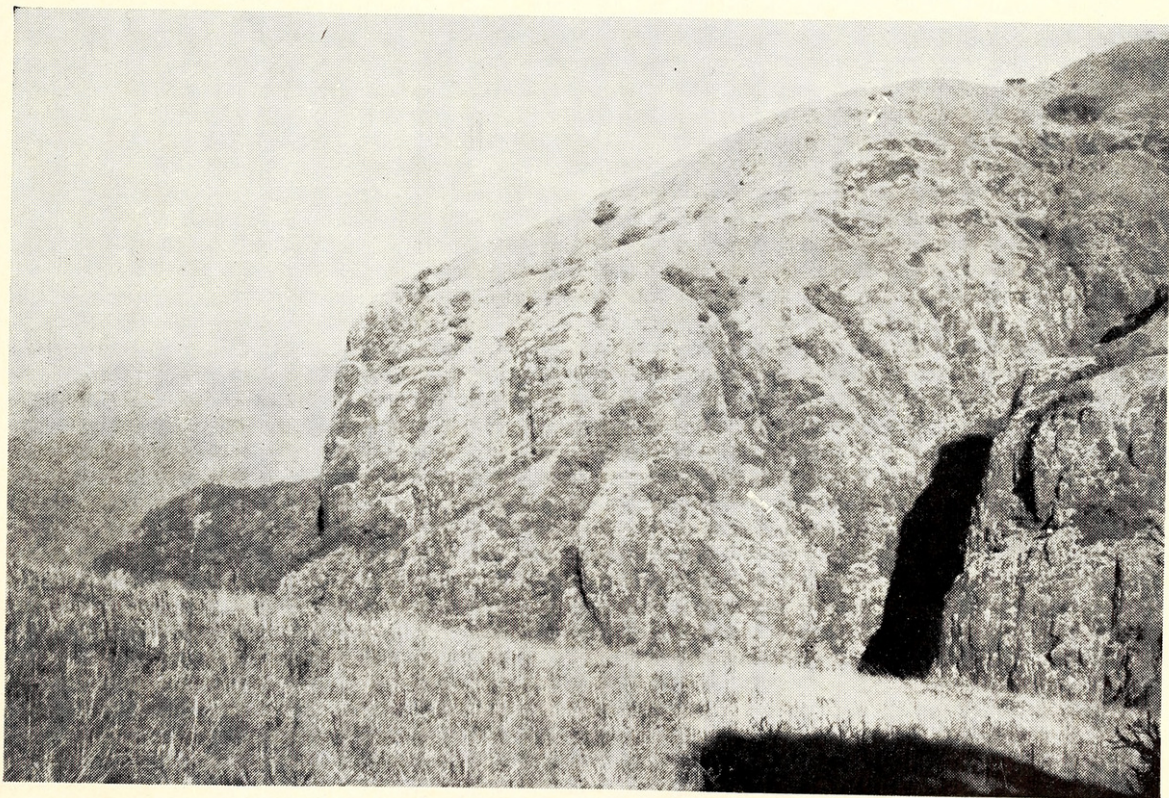
The exact status of the Tahr is somewhat uncertain. In 1963 the Nilgiri Wild Life Association carried out a survey in the Nilgiris and arrived at an estimate of 400 animals, and since that time they believe they have at least held their own, and that there might have been a slight increase in numbers. A rough estimate of just over 4000 has also been made for the other areas of this range. These figures may be inaccurate, and it seems essential that an up-to-date census should be undertaken to establish their true status so that appropriate action can be taken to ensure their survival.

At the present time they are reasonably safe in certain areas of their range in the Nilgiri Hills. Approach from the south and west is practically impossible due to the steep escarpment with its thick jungle clad lower slopes, whilst from the plateau itself a four to five hour walk keeps out those who like to poach from car or jeep, and so there is little poaching in these areas. The few 'Saddlebacks' taken out under licence by sportsmen have little impact on the herds, and their reports on what they see are of great value to the Nilgiri Wild Life Association. Unfortunately this state of affairs is not likely to last long. In the last few years dams have been erected in the Nilgiris for irrigation and hydro-electric schemes. New villages created for the construction gangs and their families remain in spite of the work having been completed. A policy of afforestation of the hills with wattle and eucalyptus is altering the habitat, and far worse, forest roads are being extended nearer and nearer tahr areas.

In one area I visited, planting had reached the edge of the escarpment, spoiling the tahr feeding grounds. Whilst on our way we passed over one hundred people constructing a road to within half-a-mile of this area where temporary hutments had been erected. The only hope for the survival of tahr in these areas is to persuade the State Government and Forest Department to leave a belt of grassland along the edge of the escarpment and to keep the areas as inaccessible as possible.

For us to see the tahr to their best advantage in January 1968, arrangements had been made to camp in one of the more remote tahr areas. We drove out from Ootacamund, passing Emerald Lake and on to Avalanche, where a further lake has recently been dammed,

Willett : Nilgiri Tahr



Above : Shola Forests below Tahr habitat ; Below : Typical Tahr country.
(Photos : J. A. Willett)



Willet, John. 1968. "The Nilgiri Tahr *Hemitragus hylocrius*." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 65, 769–771.

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