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2. NOTES ON THE FOOD HABITS OF NILGAI *BOSELAPHUS TRAGOCAMELUS*

In the course of a study on the status and distribution of mammals in Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, casual observations were made on the food habits of the nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus* from September 1984 to September 1985. Records were also made on the food plants of a tame free ranging nilgai.

In total 48 plant species were observed to be eaten. Of these 13 were tree species, five creepers /stragglers, 16 herbs and nine grasses (Table 1).

In areas where grass was burnt nilgai fed on sprouting shoots of grasses such as *Scirpus tuberosus*, *Vetiveria zizanoides*, *Desmostachya bipinnata* and *Cynodon dactylon*. In burnt areas it also fed on fallen *Zizyphus jujuba* fruits and sprouting leaves of *Acacia nilotica*, *Prosopis spicigera* and *Salvadora persica*.

During leaf shedding season (February and March) the nilgai fed on fallen leaves of *Mitragyna parvifolia*. Similarly, fallen leaves and fruits of *Zizyphus jujuba* were eaten by them from December to February. During monsoon and post monsoon they fed mainly on herbs and grasses. Dry pods of *Prosopis chilensis* and *Acacia nilotica* were also taken during summer.

Studies on food habits of nilgai in Asia show that they are browsers (e.g., Mirza and Khan 1975), while in southern Texas they are grazers (Sheffield *et al.* 1983). However, quantitative studies are required under Indian field conditions to know more about their food habits.

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