

**Liwonde National Park, Malawi**  
**Klipspringer Research Summary**  
**September 2015**

## **BACKGROUND**

The klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*) are a small antelope with a shoulder height of less than 60cm. They can be found on rocky outcrops and have adapted to the habitat by an ability to jump and climb up almost vertical rock faces. They occur throughout Malawi wherever there are suitable habitats. Specific areas where they are known to occur include Nyika National Park, Vwaza Marsh Game Reserve, Kasungu National Park, Nkhotakota, Lake Malawi National Park, Majete Game Reserve, Lengwe National Park, Liwonde National Park, and Mwabvi Game Reserve. Population sizes are probably small, numbering in the low hundreds in most conservation areas.

No known conservation measures are presently being taken, as klipspringer are considered well represented in protected areas<sup>1</sup>. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists klipspringer as an animal of least concern, with justification being that the total population has been estimated at more than 40,000, 25% of which were in protected areas (Assessor: IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group / Date Assessed: 2008-06-30)<sup>2</sup>.

We believe, however, that the klipspringer numbers in Liwonde are in the low twenties, and are the only klipspringer found in Liwonde National Park, as the area around Chinguni Hills is the only suitable habitat. Seasonal burning in Liwonde, usually conducted by the Park's authorities, has led to Chinguni Hills being burned down every season for the past 8 years. This puts the Liwonde klipspringer under serious threat. In addition, snares were discovered during field work in September and pose a threat to the remaining klipspringer.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

In 1972 there were 11 known subspecies. It has been noted that there is some confusion as to the exact taxonomic status of the population in Malawi, and in 1989 the subspecies were under review<sup>3</sup>. Since 2010, Pieter Botha has been observing the klipspringer in Liwonde National Park. It was noted on several occasions that the Liwonde klipspringer has different behaviour and a different coloration than that of the other klipspringer populations in Malawi, so far only found in the area around Chinguni Hills. This observation sparked additional interest in confirming this hypothesis and potentially identifying a unique species within Liwonde.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Rod East. *Antelopes: Southern and South-Central Africa*. Publisher: IUCN - The World Conservation Union, Switzerland (April 1989)

<sup>2</sup>IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group. 2008. *Oreotragus oreotragus*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2008: e. T15485A4650367. Downloaded on 16 September 2015.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2008.RLTS.T15485A4650367.en>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



*Illustration 1: Photograph taken at the base of Chinguni Hills. Note the color variation between the neck and the rear end, as well as the white around the eyes and size of the cheeks. Note its location out of what is considered normal territory.*

*Photo Credit: Pam Badger, September 2015*



*Illustration 2: This klipspringer was rescued in the Lake Malawi National Park area. Note that the coloration morph does not exist on the face or the rear end, further indicating the uniqueness of the klipspringer in Liwonde National Park.*

*Photo Credit: Maggie Cawley, September 2015*

## **COURSE OF ACTION & METHODOLOGY**

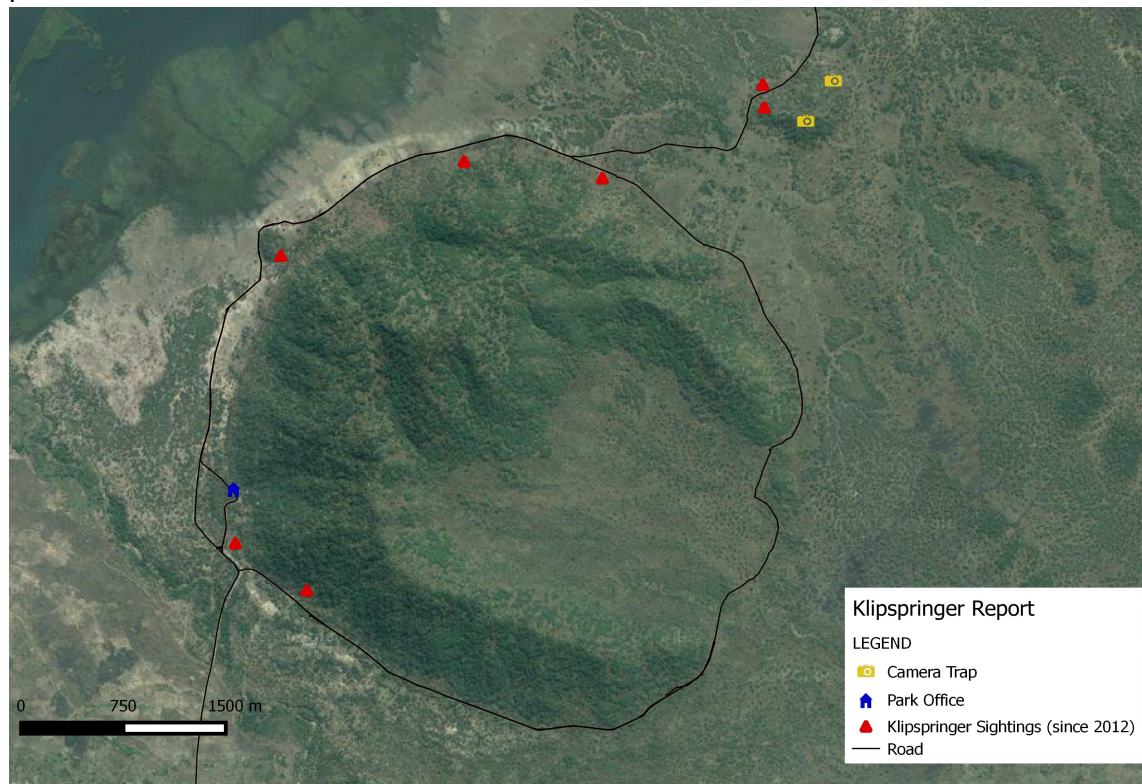
Our team spent time in the field looking for signs of the klipspringer, including hair and dung samples. African Parks provided a guide, whom had recently seen the klipspringer, to assist during our time in the field. Klipspringer dung was found at the foot of the hills. Three days were spent doing game drives of the area to cover more ground and revisit locations of recent klipspringer sightings. A drone was piloted over the hills on two occasions to survey the habitat of the antelope. Camera traps were placed in two locations; both rocky outcrops on the hill (Map 1). Locations were chosen based on previous sightings and positional visibility.

Confirmed klipspringer sightings are shown on Map 1 below. Since 2010, sightings have been mainly occurred on the lower sections of the hill with very few in the rocky outcrops, which is traditionally the chosen habitat of klipspringer. Observations have also confirmed that these klipspringer do not favor the rubber euphorbia and are seen regularly close to the staff houses, particularly in the mornings, grazing on soft, sweet grasses.

A visit to Lake Malawi National Park during the same timeframe allowed the team to visit a klipspringer in captivity from that area. This klipspringer did not share the same coloration as those found in Liwonde National Park. The team also spent two days in Mwabvi Wildlife



Reserve in the south of Malawi, where the park rangers confirmed that klipspringer in that park do not share the same coloration as those in Liwonde either.



Map 1: Chinguni Hills Map with Camera Traps & Sightings

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

This trip to Liwonde confirmed our belief that there is a rare morph of klipspringer which is unique to Liwonde National Park. Our team would like the opportunity to continue our study of the klipspringer in Liwonde National Park to further confirm this hypothesis and support their survival. Methodology and planning would be coordinated with African Parks in advance to best support their conservation goals, and with the other resident research teams working in the Park. Our team is prepared to provide all equipment and volunteers to assist in the research project, but any support or guidance from African Parks is most welcome. In our absence, we request that a flier be posted at appropriate locations so that all information related to the Liwonde klipspringer can be collected and logged appropriately.

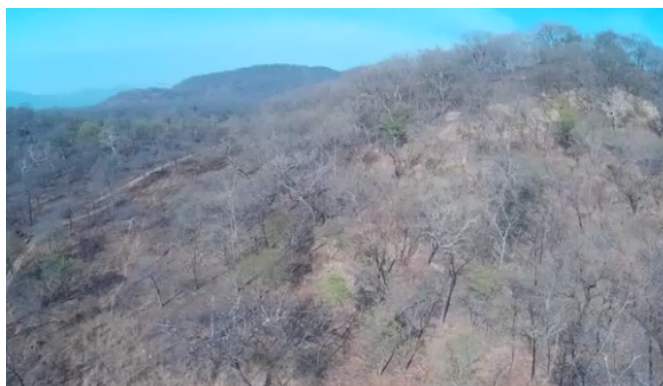


Illustration 3: Aerial of Chinguni Hills captured from drone.