Sitatunga Distribution

Zambezi Sitatunga – from Angola in the west, east into Botswana and the Caprivi of Namibia; to Zambia and Mozambique; north to the southern end of Lake Tanganyika.

Nile or East African Sitatunga – Lake Victoria and its drainage area north and west: north, through Uganda, to the Bahr-el-Ghazal of Sudan; Ruwenzori and the Ruhuhuma Swamp in Rwanda and west to northeastern Democratic Republic of the Congo; east to the Western Nyanza of Kenya; south to Tanzania.

Island Sitatunga – the Sesse Islands of Lake Victoria (Uganda).

Forest or Western Sitatunga – from Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone east through Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Chad and the CAR, south through the Democratic Republic of the Congo to northern Angola.

Zambezi Sitatunga
Tragelaphus spekei selousi

Nile or East African Sitatunga
Tragelaphus spekei spekei

Island Sitatunga
Tragelaphus spekei sylvestris

Forest or Western Sitatunga
Tragelaphus spekei gratus
The demarcations are indications only. Extensive gradation is found along all borders and is sometimes intermittent within an area.
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At the outset of this project to produce five books, one per year, on all the spiral horn antelope, there was one book I was worried about and that was this one. Why? Well, although I have hunted all four of the sitatunga subspecies and some of them more than once, it is the spiral horn species about which I know the least. The main reasons for this are twofold, firstly: there is little scientific, field-based research on the animals themselves and, secondly, their natural habitat and wary nature have dictated that, even though they fascinated me from the outset, they were very difficult to hunt and even harder to study. For example, when Craig Boddington and I submitted biological samples to one well-known university to try and establish whether the sitatunga we had shot with Pete Fisher on his Nchila game ranch in the far northwestern corner of Zambia – a mere 28 kilometres from the Angolan border and some four from the DRC – were forest sitatunga, the answer was simply that they did not know as there were no DNA samples against which our samples could be compared. Not in their university nor anywhere else for that matter.

I also assumed it would be the shortest book in the series and the chapter on forest sitatunga – which I personally think is the hardest animal to hunt in Africa – would be the shortest in the book. I was wrong on both counts and this is almost entirely due to the huge amount of help I have been given. And not just in respect of research and articles but, just as importantly, with the photographs people have so kindly provided. Ones of live sitatunga are almost more difficult to find than those of a real, live yeti!

So, a very big and sincere thank you to all 18 contributors: Craig Boddington, Don Cowie, Dick duPont, Bill Figge, Brian Herne, Robin Hurt, Harry Katrakilis, Peter Kennedy, Chris Kinsey, Rudy Lubin, Bruce Martin, Ross Murphy, John Oosthuizen, Gwyn Pirnie, Jeff Rann, Hans Schabel, Ludwig Siege and Alain Smith, who all wrote brand-new articles for the book as well as supplying some wonderful photographs, which I believe will help the reader to ‘be’ there with them on safari.

A sitatunga emerging from the forest in the late afternoon to feed on Nchila game ranch in the far northwestern corner of Zambia. Whether these are Zambezi sitatunga or forest sitatunga remains to be seen. Peter Fisher of Nchila game ranch says that “the most distinguishing thing about these animals is their small body size and huge variety of white markings ... the Lunda name is Kakonga mvudi, which basically means ‘subservient to the sitatunga’. The Lunda name for the ‘normal’ sitatunga is simply Mvudi. Why is there such a name handed down through the ages if there is not a distinct difference between them and Zambezi sitatunga?”, he goes on to ask.
The cover photograph was supplied by that outstanding wildlife photographer and top professional hunter, Jofie Lamprecht. Other professional photographers who also very kindly let me use their work were Philippe Aillery, Steve Cunliffe, Håkan Pohlstrand, Robert Ross and Mike Viljoen, the latter a regular contributor to all the books in the series of some of the most stunning wildlife photographs it has ever been my privilege to see. The other photographers, apart from the contributors, who so generously lent me their photographs were: Connie Damm, Eben Espach, Pete Fisher, Richard Flack, Andy Gooch, Skye Hartog, Tim Herald, T.D. Kelsey, Thierry Aebischer and Raffael Hikisch of the Chinko Project in CAR, Jon Meyer, Christophe Morio, Richard Sowry, Schalk Tait and Christian Weth. To each and every one of them I say a heartfelt and sincere thank you. Without you there would be no sitatunga book, as simple as that!

Owing to requests from a number of photographers, I have tried to acknowledge each photographer for the first time. As the book contains some 500 photographs, it has been a big job. I have failed to identify the source in about a half-dozen instances, and apologise for this. I have just not been able to find out where they came from. If I have made mistakes, I also apologise. I will do better next time. Promise. For a whole variety of reasons I have published this book myself with the major help and assistance of a very experienced book designer, Peter Bosman, who has been the project manager on this production. If this book is better than its predecessors, it is his doing. If it is worse, then I am at fault and I would like to thank him for helping me keep my promise and produce a book of which all the contributors and photographers can feel justly proud.

It has been an uphill battle starting my own miniscule publishing company. A number of people have actively put spokes in the wheels, not the least being the South African government which, after registering me as an exporter/importer, took over five months to issue a simple letter with my customs registration number and thereby effectively delaying the shipment of my books to North America by a similar period. During this time I was obliged to deal with 13 different people in the Department of Customs and Excise at the South African Revenue Service and, with one exception, have never come across a more grossly incompetent, bone idle and uncaringly ineffectual group of people. They say that those countries which most need small businesses to provide jobs make it the most difficult for them to start up and I can bear testimony to this sad fact.

If it were not for a number of important women in my life I think my little business would by now have been in big trouble and I would like to thank my wife, Jane, my daughter-in-law, Eileen Flack, my cousin’s stepdaughter, Helen Andrews, Pete Kennedy’s wife, Cathryn, Ellen Enzler-Herring and Barbara Crown most sincerely for all their expert help, support, hard work and understanding during these most trying times.

Last but not least, another big thank you to Rowan Dickerson, my distributor in North America, for so often going that extra kilometre. It is people like these ladies and Rowan who, regardless of the difficulties, make things happen and help restore your faith in humanity.
You are about to embark on an incredible journey across the range of all sitatunga. Whether or not you are enamoured of spiral horned antelope, this book can be a game changer for you. It may make you a more successful, more passionate hunter.

Peter has created the definitive work on sitatunga using what we lawyers call the ‘case method’. The reader journeys with renowned hunters of yesterday and today on their sitatunga hunts. The hunts cover the entire range of the animal, all the subspecies and all the methods and nuances of hunting this difficult species. This is the only book you need on sitatunga and now the most important to have.

My path first crossed Peter Flack’s over 25 years ago, during my early years of leadership of Safari Club International, before I became its president. Then, after I founded Conservation Force, a wildlife law firm and consortium of organisations, I would periodically see Peter at meetings and events from CIC in Europe to PHASA in South Africa. I have always known him to be a passionate, caring and astute hunter of the first order. He has also been a lawyer, owner of a working game ranch, businessman, co-owner of a safari company, chairman of Rowland Ward, award winning filmmaker and gifted author. And he is even the founder of the Spiral Horn Antelope Club. Peter is as special as the antelope he describes. If he were the only author, this book would be excellent. Making it even better, the foremost hunters in the world – and masters of sitatunga hunting – have written a great deal of this masterwork.

Peter believes in ‘preparation, preparation and more preparation’ before a hunt and that luck is preparation meeting chance or opportunity. The stories here cleverly instruct the reader how to successfully take this difficult game animal, which requires extensive preparation and planning. In this book, you join with masters in strategising the taking of sitatunga from Cameroon to Zambia, from shaky canoes to wobbly stand blinds, from offhanded snap shooting to shots from floating rafts of vegetation, from stalking along swamp edges to sitting over marsh burns and salt licks. It is all here in delightfully written detail. Moreover, whatever your game of choice, you will be a better hunter after reading this book because the lessons in preparing for a sitatunga hunt are transferable to any species.

I am also privileged to know most of the chapter and article authors, who are among the very top professional and amateur hunters, bringing an incredible wealth of experience to an awesome book. For example, I have been on several
safaris with Professional Hunter Jeff Rann, including my first. Jeff has guided nearly 100 hunters on successful sitatunga hunts. He recounts some of that experience in important detail, with similar entertaining and informative experiences as we had on our first safari together.

The same goes for Robin Hurt, who has written the first piece on the Nile sitatunga. Though I have never hunted with Robin (of In the Blood fame), I have worked very closely with him for decades. In just one of our projects, the Hurt Community Wildlife Project in which I serve as treasurer, we raised millions of dollars, built over 50 community schools and 12 medical dispensaries, operated four anti-poaching patrols and more. Most recently, Conservation Force is helping Robin with a white rhino reserve in Namibia that is off to a good start.

One of the amateur hunters writing about Island sitatunga is Christopher Kinsey. He too is a dear personal friend and may well be the first to have hunted all 26 members of the species and subspecies of spiral horned antelope. I know first-hand that few hunters study and know the animals they hunt as thoroughly as Chris does. He is a superlative hunter/conservationist. Like Peter, Chris’s story demonstrates how preparation pays.

Each author’s experiences verify the uniqueness of the sitatunga and its haunts. Spiral horned antelope are not your typical savannah tour-and-take game. They certainly do not circle in the open for protection. Instead, they are particularly secretive, sly and reclusive. All spiral horned antelope are hard animals to hunt and sitatunga are the hardest. The sitatunga is known as the ‘Ghost of the Swamp’ because a hint of a shape or an ivory horn tip above the curtain of reeds is all you may see. It is an animal the best of hunters rank as one you have to earn with mental and physical preparation, skill and grit. Hunting in inhospitable and inaccessible swamp habitat presents its own challenges. Hunters face close encounters with hippo, crocodile, snakes, leeches, ants and mosquitoes. Abrupt confrontations with elephant, lion and buffalo are common. The ground itself often floats and the islands are suspended mats of vegetation. On the other hand, the sights, smells and sounds of birds, frogs and hippo have an intoxicating appeal in early morning swamp mist. The difficulties make success that much more satisfying. The recounted hunts in Peter’s book bring all of this to life.

The list of contributing writers goes on and Peter holds his own among them. Peter has been on hundreds of safaris in virtually all of Africa for nearly all species and his tales of sitatunga hunting rank among the best. Most importantly, his love for the animal and the hunt shines through the book and makes it a must read and delightful experience. Enjoy the journey of real hunts for sitatunga with the greatest of hunters.

John J. Jackson, III
President of Conservation Force
Member of IUCN Antelope Specialist Group
Attorney, Naturalist, Hunter/Conservationist

Opposite: This huge forest sitatunga on the banks of a stream feeding into a CAR bai has everything you are looking for in such an animal.
Introduction

Peter Flack

Who is or was William Cotton Oswell? He is one of my favourite Southern African hunter/explorer/naturalists who I rank right up alongside my other favourite, Frederick Courteney Selous. In fact, if the humble, self-effacing Oswell had written half the number of books that Selous wrote, I think many more people might share my opinion. And but for his oldest son, confusingly called William Edward Oswell, who wrote his dad’s biography not once but twice – the first was destroyed in a fire – and a small band of loyal friends who were determined to see he received some credit for his discoveries and achievements, William Cotton Oswell would, to all intents and purposes, be unknown.

Francis Galton, who wrote the Introduction to his biography, concludes with these words, “It was my good fortune to gain the friendship of Oswell on his final return from Africa, when I quickly appreciated the remarkable nobleness of his character. I was at that time closely and eagerly connected with the Geographical Society, so that I was brought into frequent contact with every contemporary traveller of note. Among these Oswell, with his clear-cut, aquiline features, keen glance and lithe frame, suggested perhaps the most typical specimen of a man born to adventure. His striking physical gifts, combined with his aristocratic bearing and winning but modest address, seemed a living realization of the perfect and gentle knight of whom we read in old romances.”

Even allowing for Victorian hyperbole, this might seem a little over the top but, if you were to take the trouble to find and read the fascinating book, William Cotton Oswell, Hunter and Explorer, The Story of his Life with Certain Correspondence and Extracts from the Private Journal of David Livingstone, Hitherto Unpublished by his eldest son, W. Edward Oswell, published by William Heinemann (1900), I think you might agree with Galton’s assessment. In fact, you might conclude that Galton was being modest himself in his description of this remarkable man.

Born on 27 April, 1818, Oswell arrived in Cape Town 26 years later in 1844 (a mere eight years after Cornwallis Harris, the first recreational hunter to visit these shores, in order to recover from a succession of terrible fever attacks contracted in India, which had left him at death’s door. As his son wrote, “He remained in Africa two years, and with Mr Murray of Lintrose as the companion of one, and Captain Frank Vardon of the other, penetrated far beyond the utmost limits of previous geographical knowledge, exploring, hunting, revelling with them in shooting such as no men ever had before or will ever have again, the first Europeans and the first guns among the myriad of animals – a very empire of wild sport.”

Meanwhile a friendship had sprung up between Oswell and Dr David Livingstone and, when he returned to the Cape in 1848, he set out on probably the most

< Flamingoes congregating at Lake Logipi, Kenya
notable and arduous of his journeys across the Kalahari, which led to the discovery of the Zouga River (now called the Botletle, which flows to the south and east of Maun in Botswana) and Lake Ngami. Livingstone wrote of the lake that, “It is of such magnitude that we could not see the further shore and could only guess its size from the reports of the natives that it took three days to go round it.” Unfortunately, over the next hundred years this huge body of water gradually ceased to exist and Botswana government maps no longer show the outline of the former lake. But, as his son then continues:

“The next season he devoted entirely to hunting over the ground traversed in the previous year. Making his way to the lake first, he shot down both banks of the river with extraordinary and unvarying success. In 1851 he enabled Livingstone and his family again to join him by giving them a wagon and supplies; and pushing northwards to the country of Sebitoane, they met with the heartiest welcome and most courteous consideration from that famous chief. Having obtained permission for a further advance, they shared the important discovery of the Zambesi in those regions.”

Although he took no credit for Livingstone’s further discoveries over the next year, but for Oswell they would almost certainly not have been made, as he not only provided another wagon and oxen to Livingstone, free of charge, when he had neither but gave sufficient cash and clothing to him and his family to allow Livingstone to proceed with his explorations. The good doctor duly acknowledged Oswell’s contributions in letters to both the London Missionary Society and Geographical Society but not fully or publicly enough for the man in the street to be aware of the vital role Oswell had played and, as usual, the ever modest Oswell said or wrote nothing.

But what does this have to do with a book on sitatunga? Well, in 1850, some 11 years before Speke (after whom the animal was subsequently incorrectly named by Sclater) was given the horns and skin of a sitatunga as well as a live, young male by King Rumanika of the Karagweh, Oswell became the first white person to successfully hunt, kill and describe one. The event is set out in his biography as follows:

“At Lakes Kamadou and Ngami he secured several specimens of the nakong – the new antelope seen during the expedition of the previous year.” Oswell himself described the animal, which left no doubt that it was a sitatunga, as follows, “It is a veritable swamp liver, about the size of the goat, with long brownish hair, and horns resembling those of the kudu in miniature. The abnormal elongation of its hoof enables it to skim over the surface of morasses into which other antelopes would sink. I have the hoof of one which is very nearly four inches long. If it were in the ratio of the animal’s size, one and a half inches would be the proportion. On the hard ground the nakong runs with difficulty – the swamp shoe is a hindrance. Instead of escaping by flight or concealment in the bush on being disturbed, it makes straight for the water, sits down in it, and submerges all but the nostrils, until the danger be overpast.”

John Hanning Speke was a controversial character who somehow managed to shoot himself on the morning before he was due to debate with Burton – an even more controversial man – at the Royal Geographic Society,
whether Speke’s claim to have found the source of the Nile was justified. In *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* by John Hanning Speke, Captain H.M. Indian Army, Fellow and Gold Medallist of the Royal Geographical Society, Hon. Corr. Member and Gold Medallist of the French Geographical Society, Etc., with Map and Portraits and Numerous Illustrations, Chiefly from Drawings by Captain Grant and published by Harper & Brothers, Publishers (1864), to give the book its full title, he writes of his ‘discovery’ as follows: “Rumanika in the morning sent me a young male nzoe (water-boc) which his canoe-men had caught in the high rushes at the head of the lake, by the King’s order, to please me; for I had heard this peculiar animal described in such strange ways at Kaze, both by Musa and the Arabs, I was desirous of having a look at one. It proved to be closely allied to a water boc found by Livingstone on the Ngami Lake; but, instead of being striped, was very faintly spotted, and so long were its toes, it could hardly walk on the dry ground; while its coat, also well adapted to the moist element it lived in, was long, and of such excellent quality that the natives prize it for wearing almost more than any other of the antelope tribe. The only food it would eat were the tops of papyrus rushes; but, though it ate and drank freely, and lay down very quietly, it had always charged with ferocity any person who went near it.”

To add insult to the injury done to Oswell and pile injustice upon injustice, the Hon. Walter Rothschild then went on to give the Zambezi sitatunga, first hunted successfully and described for science by Oswell, the name *Tragelaphus selousi* after the famous hunter who, in fact, was never able to shoot one himself, no matter how hard he tried! As Selous wrote in *A Hunter’s Wanderings in Africa. Being A Narrative of Nine Years Spent Amongst the Game of the Far Interior of South Africa, Containing the Accounts of Explorations beyond the Zambezi, on the River Chobe, and in the Matabele and Mashuna Countries with Full Notes on the Natural History and Present Distribution of All the Large Mammalia*, published by Richard Bentley & Son (1881), “At daybreak we again embarked in our little fleet, still
skirting along the shore of a marsh in a south-westerly direction. Where the main channel of the Chobe was, I did not know; as far as we can see to the north, the whole country was a sheet of water, interspersed with islands, and intersected here and there by deep streams ... .

On returning to the river, I found my fleet augmented by the arrival of three more canoes, whose owners said their town was on an island not far off, from whence, hearing my shots, they had at once come across, in the hope of finding something that had been killed, for a share of which they might come in. These men told me that in some thick beds of reeds near their town were some sitatunga antelopes. This antelope, of which I shall have more to say later on, is the Tragelaphus spekei of naturalists, and, like every other animal, is known by different names in different parts of the country ... . As I wanted to obtain a specimen of this rare and beautiful antelope ... I resolved to devote the rest of the day to their pursuit ... .

A paddle of some two miles brought us to a small island, the residence of my guides ... . After spending an hour in examining the various contrivances of these people, I again embarked and paddled off in quest of sitatunga antelopes. Much to my regret, however, both on this and subsequent occasions, my endeavours to obtain a specimen of this rare and beautiful water antelope were vain. They are only to be found in dense beds of the reeds through which it is difficult to propel a canoe; and even in districts where they are plentiful, one seldom meets with them. When approached (I speak from native report) they do not attempt to
run away, but immerse their whole bodies – leaving only their noses and the tips of their horns above water – trusting that they will be unobserved. In this way the natives paddle quite close, and spear them as they stand.”

Later in the same book he wrote about the animal, which he referred to as *Tragelaphus spekei*, as follows:

“This antelope is only found in the extensive swamps which exist in some parts of the interior of Africa. In the reed-beds of the Mababe, Tamalakan, and Machabe rivers it is to be found, and in the vast marshes through which the Chobe runs it must exist in considerable numbers, although, as it only emerges from the dense reed-beds at nights, it is scarcely ever to be seen. In 1879 I tried hard to shoot some of these animals on the Chobe, searching for them in a canoe amongst the reed-beds at dawn and after sunset; but though I disturbed several, and heard them splashing away amongst the reeds and papyrus, I only saw one female alive, though one morning I found a fine ram lying dead that had evidently been killed fighting with a rival during the night. The head and feet of this animal I preserved. The female that I saw was standing breast deep in the water, in the midst of a bed of reeds, feeding on the young shoots that just appeared above the water. When she saw us, she at once made off, making a tremendous splashing as she plunged through the water. The natives told me that very often when these antelopes are met with under similar circumstances they do not attempt to run, but sinking down in the water, submerge their whole bodies, leaving only their nostrils above the surface, and trusting that their enemies will pass them
They (the Kafirs) then paddle close alongside and assegai them from the canoe. As all the situtungas whose skins I saw had been killed with assegais and not shot, I have no doubt that this statement is correct. Another way the natives have of killing them is by setting fire to the reed-beds when they become quite dry, and then waiting for the situtunga in their canoes in one of the channels of open water by which the marsh is intersected. Driven forwards by the advancing fire the antelopes are at last obliged to swim across the open water to gain the shelter of the reeds on the farther side, and the natives are thus often enabled to cut off and assegai some of them in mid-stream. It is a curious zoological fact that the situtunga found on the lower Chobe do not possess the power of being able to sleep beneath the surface of the water, or even of diving, enjoyed by the same antelopes met with by Major Serpa Pinto only about 200 miles farther up the course of the same river. An adult male situtunga antelope is just about the size of a male lechwe, with a thick-set, heavy body and very powerful neck. The hair is longer and more silky than in any other species. The longest pair of horns I have seen measured 2 feet 1 inch in a straight line from point to base. The hoofs grow to a great length, and sometimes become white, and, as in the lechwe, the space between the back of the hoof and the dew-claw is devoid of hair ... Like its congener the bushbuck, the situtunga goes in pairs, and is not met with in herds. The females have not horns on the lower Chobe, as they are said to have farther north by Major Pinto."

Selous, ever the gentleman, did not cast aspersions on Pinto’s supposed observations but both are patently nonsense, although Stigand and Lyell, in
their book *Central African Game and its Spoor*, published by Horace Cox (1906), did mention that sitatunga can swim under water for short distances.

What Selous did have to say, however, is something I have found compelling, based on my own observations. In *The Gun at Home and Abroad, The Big Game of Africa & Europe* by F.C. Selous, J.G. Millais and Abel Chapman, published by the London and Counties Press Association Ltd (MCMXIV – 1914), he writes about the *sitetungas – Tragelaphus [Limnotragus] spekei* of East Central Africa, *Tragelaphus [Limnotragus] gratus* of West Central Africa and *Tragelaphus [Limnotragus] selousi* of South Central Africa – Island sitatunga named by Colonel Meinertzhagen had not yet been described for science – as follows:

“Although the word ‘sitetunga’ is only used by one small tribe of African natives to designate a certain species of antelope nearly related to the bushbucks, which is found in the great reed beds and papyrus swamps of the Upper Zambezi, the name has now been adopted by all sportsmen and naturalists for all the geographical races of these water-loving antelopes wherever they are met with throughout Africa.

“Wherever great reed beds and papyrus swamps exist in that continent there situtungas of one kind or another are sure to be found. In the southern race, whose habitat extends from Lake N’gami to Lake Bangweolo, both males and females, when adults, are of a uniform light brown. The young are much darker in the general colour of the coats, which are, too, beautifully striped and spotted with yellowish white. I once obtained from the natives on the Chobi the skin of a young situtunga, taken from its mother’s womb just before birth. This little skin was the colour of very dark moleskin, beautifully banded and spotted with yellow. Below the stripes a line of spots ran from the shoulders to the haunches, which latter were very profusely spotted. The whole pattern of the spots and stripes on the skin of this foetus situtunga was identical with that attained to by the fully adult male bushbucks found in the dry forest-covered ground along the southern bank of the Chobi. Nothing, I think, could prove more conclusively the common origin of these two species of antelopes, although today they are found living under such very different conditions. Besides the southern race of situtungas, two or three other nearly allied forms are recognised. In the race which is found in Uganda and which seems to extend southwards as far as the Upper Zambezi, where it integrates with the southern forms, the young are red in ground-colour, spotted and striped with white, and although the males, when adult, become dark brown and lose their spots and stripes, the females never lose their red coloration. But, after all, the differences between the various geographical races of situtungas are only superficial, and wherever these animals are found their habits are the same.”
The text in bold above has received the support of authorities such as Jonathan Kingdon and Michael Hoffman in the new and comprehensive book on African mammals, *Mammals of Africa, Volume IV*, published by Bloomberg in 2013 (Kingdon), in which they state that:

“As many as ten subspecies had been described, mainly based on hair texture, pelage colour and absence or presence of body stripes and spots. However, hair texture probably varies with climate, and pelage colour and presence of stripes and spots are highly variable even within the same population (some individuals are born with the stripes and spots and others without). Furthermore, pelage colour darkens with age in some individuals, especially in older males, and stripes and spots fade with age, again especially in males ... Sitatunga are probably monotypic, but until verified, at best only three subspecies, centred on different drainage systems, are provisionally retained ... However, a comparison of recent field descriptions spanning these basins ... reveals that these three subspecies cannot be reliably distinguished on the oft-cited characteristics of pelage colour and pattern.”

The three subspecies recognised by Kingdon are *Tragelaphus spekii spekii* from the Lake Victoria Basin – only faint shadow stripes on the bodies of both sexes; *T. s. gratus* from the Congo Basin, West Africa and Sudan – bold body stripes and spots on both sexes but fading in adolescent males; and *T. s. selousi* from the Bangweulu, Zambezi and Okavango basins – body stripes and spots often present in females and young but absent in males.

So, what about Island sitatunga recognised by both record books? Kingdon went on to state, “Meinertzhagen (1916) elected the name *sylvestris* for Sitatungas on Nkose I. in the northwest corner of L. Victoria, which had stouter and stronger hooves than a population on a larger island nearby. Nkose I. is <1 km², dry, and densely forested to its edge, and separated from other Sitatunga populations by about 20 km of open water. Meinertzhagen’s measurements plus a drawing of a hoof confirm that Nkose I. Sitatungas clearly have wider feet than usual. However, to give this inbred, restricted population equal status to subspecies that range over thousands of kilometres seems hard to justify ... .”

On the subject of the hooves of Island sitatunga, Shorthose in his book, *Sport & Adventure in Africa*, published by J.B. Lippincott Company (1923), had these comments: “In the days of which I write most of them – i.e. the Sesse islands – were forbidden to human beings, since they swarmed with the deadly sleeping sickness tsetse fly, the *Glossina palpalis*. In consequence of their desertion by mankind, the sitatunga increased by leaps and bounds. For many years had they thus been left sole possessors, with the exception of two or three other species of large mammals, such as monkies, leopards, and pig. Being unmolested, their habits changed, and so evolved a slight difference in the structure of their feet. Very different from their brothers on the mainland, they almost became land-loving animals, and so their feet developed a hard surface, assumed a less elongated shape, and grew hairy.”
That might be all well and good but, for the purposes of this book, I can see no good reason to depart from the four subspecies delineated by Rowland Ward’s Records of Big Game, namely, Nile sitatunga, forest or western sitatunga, Zambezi sitatunga and Island sitatunga. The SCI Record Book of Big Game Animals also divides sitatunga into four but gives them slightly different names and calls Nile sitatunga, East African sitatunga; the Island sitatunga; Sesse Island sitatunga and the forest or western sitatunga, merely forest. This book will cover all four of these subspecies and what will soon become clear is that this member of the spiral horn family has proved the most difficult to hunt successfully of all the nine members of this august group of animals. Over the 122 years of its existence, a total of 329 sitatunga across all four subspecies – Nile (39), forest or western (95), Zambezi (155) and Island (40) – have been entered into The Book, which is less than three per year on average and less even than the number of lesser kudu entries (353), the next scarcest member of this elite group, although bongo, at 372 entries, challenge them for this spot. The SCI Record Book of Big Game Animals reflects a similar trend and, given their far less demanding standards, there are 654 sitatunga entries versus 542 for lesser kudu. As one of my friends likes to say, “If you want to hunt sitatunga, you had better bring your lunch!”