

## Antelope (includes Sables, Impalas, and Elands)



**Range:** antelope species can be found in parts of [Africa](#), [Asia](#), and the Middle East

**Habitat:** varies widely, from [savanna](#) to [woodlands](#) to [marshes and swamps](#) to [desert](#), depending on the species



### It's about horns and hooves

**Horns**— All antelope [species](#) have [horns](#), although in some species they are only found on the males. The horns are made of a bony core, encased in a hard material made largely of [keratin](#). They are permanently attached—not like a deer's [antlers](#), which are shed each year.

Some antelope horns, like those of the [kudu](#) *Tragelaphus* sp. and [eland](#) *Taurotragus* sp., twist in interesting spirals; others have ridges, like those of the **impala** *Aephyceros melampus* and the **sable antelope** *Hippotragus niger*; and others grow in wide curves with a sharp point on the end, like those of the **wildebeest** *Connochaetes* sp. (also called the gnu, a name it gets from its call, which sounds like “ge-nu”).

Antelope use their horns in defense against [predators](#); males and sometimes females also use them to establish their position in a [herd](#) or to fight rivals

**Hooves**— Hooves are another specialty for many antelope. Each hoof has a split down the middle, dividing the hoof into two “toes.” Because they live in wetlands and swamps, [sitatungas](#) *Tragelaphus spekeii* have wide hooves up to 7 inches (18 centimeters) across that help them walk on mud and mats of plants without slipping.



[Nile lechwes](#) *Kobus magaceros*, which also live in swampy areas, have long, pointed hooves to give them sure footing in the water. The **slender-horned gazelle** *Gazella leptoceros* has sturdy, wide hooves so it can walk on the shifting sand of its desert [habitat](#). And the **klipspringer** *Oreotragus oreotragus* has tiny, rounded hooves with a pad in the center that acts like a suction cup, so these nimble antelope can hop from rock to rock without falling.

## Having a social life

We tend to think of antelope as living in big groups, but not all species form large herds. Some antelope are famous for their massive herds, like the thousands of **wildebeest** making their annual [migration](#) across the African plains. Others, like **duikers** *Cephalophus* sp., [bongos](#) *Tragelaphus euryceros*, **dik-diks** *Madoqua* sp., and **sitatungas**, live alone, in pairs, or in small groups of between 3 and 10 animals. The [social](#) life of antelope depends a lot on the type of habitat they live in and how much food and water is available.



Some antelope species, like **impalas**, **springboks** *Antidorcas marsupialis*, and **saigas** *Saiga tatarica* form very large herds during migratory seasons when they are on the move to find the best food. The males are not usually [territorial](#) at these times, but they may separate out during the breeding season and stake out a territory where they compete for females. They may also use size or strength displays or threaten with their horns to determine who's [dominant](#) and to keep females. Many antelope that live in large groups at least part of the year also have special scent glands on their hooves, so they leave the herd's scent on the ground for any stray members to find.

In territorial species like **sable antelope**, [oryx](#) *Oryx* sp., **waterbuck** *Kobus ellipsiprymnus*, **bontebok** *Damaliscus pygargus*, and **gazelles**, the males choose a particular piece of habitat and defend it from other adult males. Herds of females and their young can come and go freely, although in the breeding season the male will try to keep them in his territory. If he has a stream or shady tree in his area, he's more likely to keep the females around. The territorial males of these species also mark their territory with secretions from special scent glands and with urine

and dung piles. Males that are not quite full grown or that have not established a territory form [bachelor herds](#).



## Antelope munchies

Antelope are [herbivores](#), with an odd exception: some species of **duikers** have been known to kill and eat [insects](#), small mammals, and [birds](#). Otherwise, antelope tend to be either [browsers](#) or [grazers](#). Some species switch back and forth, eating whatever is most nutritious or what's available during dry or cold times of the year.

Some antelope have special feeding [adaptations](#) for their [environments](#). **Addaxes** *Addax nasomaculatus* know to follow the rains, traveling great distances to eat the new plant growth. **Thomson's gazelles** *Gazella thomsonii* follow herds of migrating **wildebeest** and [zebras](#), which eat the tougher layer of grasses and leave the shorter, more tender shoots behind. Perhaps two of the oddest-looking antelope are the **gerenuk** *Litocranius walleri* and the **dibatag** *Ammodorcas clarkei*, both of which have slender bodies, long thin legs, and very long necks. They can stand upright on their hind legs and stretch up with those long necks to eat leaves that other species can't reach!



## Hidden away or on the run

Antelope calves have two survival strategies: either they hide out to avoid predators, or they start traveling right after birth so they can join the protection of the herd. The majority of antelope use the hiding approach, like **eland**s, **greater kudu** *Tragelaphus strepsiceros*, **roan antelope** *Hippotragus equinus*, **waterbucks**, **klipspringers**, and **duikers**. In some species that live in groups the mother, called a dam, goes away from the herd to give birth, and when the calf is strong enough, she moves it to another location where there are bushes, long grasses, rocks, or a thicket to hide the youngster from predators. The dam then rejoins the herd, and the calf remains hidden and quiet. She comes back periodically to feed the calf, calling softly to it and listening for the bleat. Between a week and a month or more, depending on the species, the calf then joins the herd and may be put with the other calves in what's known as a "nursery group." In more [solitary](#) species, the dam hides her calf and then stays nearby to guard it as she feeds, returning to nurse it when needed. When the calf is strong enough, it joins her and they stay together until the calf is mature and heads out on its own.

In species that migrate or live in large ranges, like the **hartebeest** *Alcelaphus buselaphus*, **topi** *Damaliscus lunatus*, **bontebok**, and **wildebeest**, the calves are up and on their feet within a few minutes to a day or so after they are born, and they immediately start traveling with the herd. They often stick together as a group and are protected by adults surrounding them. This way they don't get left behind and can nurse from their mothers. If danger approaches, the adults can face the challenge with their strength and their horns.