

OBSERVATIONS ON THE MALE COLORATION  
OF BANTENG IN THAILAND

by  
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In Thailand, to-day, there still exist only three species of wild cattle. They are the wild buffalo, the gaur, and the banteng, which we call in Thai wua daeng.

The number of wild cattle in the Thai jungles has diminished so alarmingly due to indiscriminate shooting by both local hunters and sportsmen that unless appropriate measures are soon taken, within a few years, wild cattle will be completely wiped out in this kingdom.

The banteng and the gaur are related species. The most distinctive characteristic that distinguishes the one from the other is:

The Banteng has a large white patch on the buttock which extends from the hocks to the root of the tail. In general build the banteng is slighter than the gaur. The ridge on its back is much less developed and its legs are proportionately longer. The head is more elongated and pointed; the horns are relatively more slender. When the animal is young the horns are cylindrical; but among adults, they are flattened on the outer and upper surfaces, incurved towards the tips and somewhat backcurved at the base; the forehead is covered with hard and somewhat horny warty skin, or horny shield. The tail descends below the hocks and the dewlap is of moderate size.

Accounts of the habits of banteng are not very full. It appears that the animal is less addicted to climbing rocky hills than the gaur. This is probably due to its relatively longer legs. This thus puts it more at the mercy of hunters.

The distribution of this animal is widespread. It is found in most of Thailand, in Burma, Malaya, Java, Sumatra and Borneo, but no record has been obtained of its existence south of Chumporn in the Thai peninsular. This may be due to intensive hunting in earlier days, which has resulted in the extermination of the banteng in that area, or it may be due to the unfavorable nature of the country.

The male coloration of this animal is very interesting. The original or ancestral colour of banteng is probably reddish brown on the outer and upper surface as commonly found in most parts of Thailand.

The calves are distinguished from the adults only by the existence of a dark streak down the back which gradually disappears with maturity. The adult or old bulls tend to be a shade darker than the cows or the calves. Some old bulls, however, have been found to have deep brown colour except for the distinctive white patch on the buttock, which the Thai people generally describe as a being black.

There exists in a rather limited area of Thailand a really black male form which replaces the reddish brown form of the other parts of the country. This coloration plus the nocturnal habit of the species blends it better with the dark shady surroundings where it prefers to hide; therefore fewer specimens have been observed or bagged by hunters. The range of this colour form, according to my estimation, is from Petchburi down to Chumporn.

Yet another colour form, which may be a freak or a sign of extreme old age, is the dark grey with whitish patches or blotches. Few specimens have been found in the North of Thailand and have been called "Wua plaugh or Wua tanode" by some Thai people. Unfortunately no specimen of the skin or records of close observation of the animal have been kept to ascertain the position of this colour variation.





Many subspecies of *Bibos banteng* have been described by scientists in the past, but it is difficult to tell whether they are real subspecies or just colour phases or individual differences similar to the case of the black and ordinary leopard or panther. In the leopards both black and yellow cubs are born in the same litter or black forms are born in one litter and the ordinary form in the next, but no one, as far as I know, has been able to study the life history of the banteng. Again, in Thailand, the black leopards are confined mostly to the peninsular region and the ordinary form is dominant everywhere else. Why such a demarcation line exists and what influences such a colour phase would be an interesting subject to study.

My belief, therefore, is that whatever colour the bantengs in Thailand may assume, they are all of one species, not deserving even the honor of a subspecies, at most they should be differentiated by alphabetic designation such as colour phase a, b or c.

The specimen obtained by myself near the border of Karen in Prachuab province, as illustrated, is a black phase in a true sense, as it is all black except for the distinctive white markings of the species, the greyish front, the white lips and narrow strip around the muzzle; the narrow brownish streak along the middle of the back and the brownish black upper surface of the ears.

The measurements of this animal are as follows :

Length. from the tip of the nose to the		
tail attachment.	3.66 m.	12 ft.
Height. at the hump	1.66 m.	65 1/3 in.
Horns. maximum width.	91 cm.	35 3/4 in.
tip to tip.	74 cm.	29 in.
circumference at base.	41 cm.	16 in.

Another specimen which I encountered sometime later in the same area is smaller than the above, but it is difficult to tell whether the coloration is exactly alike as I had only a moment to observe it and was more interested in obtaining a moving picture of it than in bagging it. Unfortunately I was also unable to get a moving picture of it.

