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PREVIEW

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Mother-infant behavior and ecology of Grevy's zebra, *Equus grevyi*

Rowen, Mary, D.F.

Yale University, School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, 1992

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PREVIEW

Mother-infant Behavior and Ecology of Grevy's Zebra
Equus grevyi

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Forestry and Environmental Studies
Yale University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Forestry and Environmental Studies

by
Mary Rowen

May, 1992

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PREVIEW

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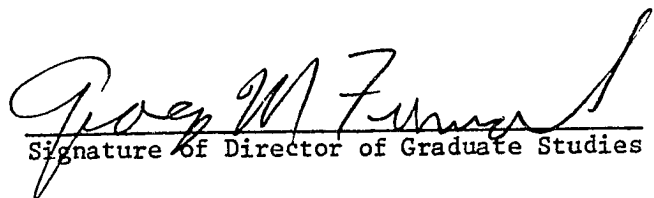
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ABSTRACT

Mother-infant Behavior and Ecology of
Grevy's Zebra, *Equus grevyi*

Mary Rowen
School of Forestry and Environmental Studies
Yale University
1992

Mother-infant behavior of Grevy's zebra (*Equus grevyi*) is analyzed in relation to parental investment, infant survival and the function of mother-infant groups. Behavioral and ecological data were collected on 1,000+ individually recognized zebra in Buffalo Springs, Samburu and Shaba National Reserves, Kenya.

Maternal input, in terms of milk allocation, was similar for male and female infants throughout early and midlactation (0-6 months). Male and female infants used similar behaviors to initiate suckling; at the same time, lactating females used similar levels of aggression to terminate male and female suckling bouts. Comparison with previous work on this species indicates that while suckling time varies with environmental conditions, maternal input is equal for male and female infants.

Mothers and infants within the reserves tended to stay on fewer than two male territories during early and mid lactation. Within the study area, mother-infant pairs that remained in one area experienced lower infant mortality compared to mother-infant pairs that moved in and out of the

reserves on a regular basis. Before they began drinking water on their own at four months, foals outside the reserves suffered 3-5 times greater mortality than foals in stable groups within the reserves.

Infants in groups participated in social play similar to that seen in harem social systems. Territorial stallions did not interact with infants on a regular basis. Stallion chases of foals were rare and appeared to be a method for moving adult females across territory boundaries rather than attempts to injure infants.

Conservation plans for this species must ensure maintenance of major foaling areas. Tourist and pastoralist use of certain important water sources must be monitored such that their use does not decrease the survivorship of young Grevy's zebra foals.

PREVIEW

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iv
List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xii
Chapter I	Introduction, Study Area, and Animal Identification
Introduction	1
Ecology of Grevy's Zebra	3
The social system	3
Reproductive requirements of Grevy's zebra	5
Study Area	7
Vegetation	11
Water	12
Predators	18
Identifying and Aging Study Animals	19
Identifying animals	19
Estimating infant ages	25
Conditions scores	25
Data Analysis	28
Chapter II	The Ecology of Lactation: Differential Investment, Cost, and Environmental Mediation
Introduction	29
Methods	35
Sampling of nursing bouts	35
Nursing duration	37
Nursing interval	40
Nursing rate	41
Initiation and termination of nursing bouts	41
Nursing attempts	44
Data Analysis	48
Results	48
Female condition	48
Nursing bouts	51
Behaviors used to initiate and terminate nursing bouts	54
Nursing attempts	60
"Sip" nursing	62
Weaning	64
Discussion	64
Conclusions	78

Chapter III	Female Ranging Patterns and Infant Mortality	
	Introduction	81
	Methods	85
	Census data	85
	Female reproductive class	86
	Infant age	86
	Infant mortality	87
	Results	90
	Census data	90
	Birth rate and season	94
	Infant mortality	96
	Discussion	99
Chapter IV	Mother-Infant Groups and Infant Social Development	
	Introduction	104
	Methods	109
	Group boundaries and composition	109
	Territory boundaries	110
	Infant behavior	111
	Results	113
	Group size	113
	Territory use by females	115
	Stallions and the formation of mother-infant groups	115
	Interactions between stallions and foals	119
	Infant development	120
	Investigatory behavior	122
	Feeding	123
	Social development	123
	Interactions between foals and adult females	128
	Formation of kindergartens	129
	Discussion	132
	Infant development	134
	Play	137
	Kindergartens or creche behavior	138
	Conclusions	141
Chapter V	Summary of Results and Considerations for Conservation	
	Summary	143
	Conservation of Grevy's Zebra	144
	Recommendations for conservation	147
References		149

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	Map of Kenya and location of study area	8
1.2	Buffalo Spring, Samburu and Shaba National Reserves	9
1.3	Main study area	10
1.4	Yearly rainfall at Archer's Post, (1976-1989)	14
1.5	Monthly rainfall at Archer's Post, Kenya	15
1.6	Rainfall at Archer's Post, Kenya. January 1988-March 1990	17
1.7	Location of predators seen during this study	20
1.8	Identification of stripe types	22
1.9	Duplicate stripe patterns	24
1.10	Estimation of animal condition	27
2.1	Average adult body condition throughout the study	49
2.2	Body condition by reproductive class	50
2.3	Distribution of nursing bout durations	52
2.4	Average length of nursing bouts for male and female foals	53
2.5	Average nursing intervals for male and female foals	55
2.6	Total seconds nursing per hour for male and female foals	56
2.7	Percent of nursing bouts initiated by mother or foal	57
2.8	Percent of nursing bouts initiated aggressively by the foal	57
2.9	Percent of bout terminated by mother of foal	59
2.10	Percent of bouts terminated aggressively by the mother	59
2.11	Percent of failed nursing attempts	61
2.12	Number of attempts prior to successful nursing	61
2.13	Intervals between suckling events	63
2.14	Nursing durations during wet and dry conditions	68
2.15	Wet and dry year nursing terminations	70
2.16	Wet and dry year aggressive terminations	70
2.17	Nursing intervals during wet and dry conditions	72
3.1	Females censused each month	92
3.2	Number of infants born per month	95
4.1a	Average group size of non-lactating females	114
4.1b	Average group size of lactating females	114
4.2	Number of territories visited by individual females	116
4.3	Foal time budgets, grazing and resting	124
4.4	Percent of time spent grazing	125
4.5	Percent of time spent resting	125
4.6	Location of stallion territories	131

LIST OF TABLES

1.1	Description of foal age in relation to coat color	26
2.1	Behaviors used to initiate nursing bouts	42
2.2	Infant age classes	43
2.3	Levels of initiation used in analysis of data	45
2.4	Behaviors used to terminate nursing bouts	46
2.5	Levels of termination used in analysis of data	47
3.1	Numbers of adult females seen	91
3.2	Numbers of females seen during wet or dry months	93
3.3	Mortality of foals born to resident mothers	97
3.4	Estimated mortality using known deaths	98
3.5	Estimated mortality using mark-resighting data	98
3.6	Comparison of mortality estimates	98
4.1	Differences in the number of territories visited	117
4.2	Number of territories used by females	118
4.3	Instances of stallions chasing foals	121
4.4	Sample play bout	127
4.5	Location of mother-infant groups in relation to water type	130

PREVIEW

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, STUDY AREA, AND ANIMAL IDENTIFICATION

INTRODUCTION

Ultimately, the success of a species depends on its ability to produce viable offspring that in turn reproduce. The length of post-copulatory investment in offspring varies between none in many species of fish to prolonged periods of parental care in birds and mammals (Clutton-Brock 1991). Care of infants by individuals that are not parents occurs in cooperative breeding systems when either siblings, social group members, or polyandrous males help provision and care for young (Moehlman 1986, 1988; Brown 1987; Clutton-Brock 1991). Levels of parental care by males and females vary between species.

Since all mammalian infants require milk for survival, all mammalian mothers care for their infants post-parturition. Milk is energetically expensive to produce and lactating females must increase their intake of energy and, to varying degrees, water (Oftedal 1984, 1985). Increased water and forage requirements force lactating females of some species to change their patterns of habitat use from those of their non-lactating cohorts; the Grevy's zebra (*Equus grevyi*) is one such species (Ginsberg 1988).

The Grevy's zebra is endemic to the semi-arid regions

of northern Kenya, southern Ethiopia and Somalia. Compared to camels and other ruminant ungulates of semi-arid and arid regions, Grevy's zebra are very water dependent (Taylor et al. 1970; Yagil 1985; Wilson 1989). Non-lactating adults need to drink every few days while lactating mares drink daily (Klingel 1967,1974; Ginsberg 1988). Water availability controls where Grevy's zebra can graze within their home range. Lactating females remain within a few kilometers of water while animals in different reproductive stages can graze > 10 km from water (Klingel 1974, Ginsberg 1988).

The social organization of Grevy's zebra is comprised of territorial stallions that maintain territories in areas close to water and/or in areas with good forage, and females and bachelor males that move within, across and outside territories within their home range (Rubenstein 1986, Ginsberg 1988). Females tend to form groups with other females in similar stages of reproduction. No groups are permanent but early lactation females form associations that can last 90 days or more (Ginsberg 1988). These females are generally found within 3 kilometers of water on areas that are defended by territorial stallions (Ginsberg 1988).

Previous studies of this species have questioned how well suited the Grevy's zebra is to its arid environment. Klingel (1977) suggested that the territorial or resource defense social system of Grevy's zebra and African and Asiatic asses (*E. africanus*, *E. hemionus*) is better suited

to mesic areas whereas the female defense or harem social system of horses, Burchell's and Mountain zebra (*E. caballus*, *E. burchelli*, *E. zebra*) is better suited to more xeric conditions. However, Ginsberg (1988) argues that a social system that allows for changes in female movement according to their nutritional and water needs is best suited to the unpredictability of semi-arid environments.

This study focuses on the factors that affect infant survival from parturition to weaning. Three areas are investigated: maternal investment, as measured by milk allocation; maternal ranging patterns and infant survival; and infant behavior and ecology within the mother-infant group. The concluding section of this dissertation summarizes the behavioral and environmental factors which influence infant survival, and addresses how this information can be used for the conservation of this endangered species.

ECOLOGY OF GREVY'S ZEBRA

The social system

Emlen and Oring (1977) developed an ecological model of mating strategies dependent on the abundance and distribution of females, seasonality of breeding, and female-female social relationships. To obtain copulations, males must have access to estrous females. Males can increase their likelihood of paternity by monopolizing

females throughout estrus. Within the genus *Equus* (family Equidae), two mating strategies predominate. Female defense polygamy (harems) occurs when a stallion is able to monopolize a cohesive group of females. Resource defense polygamy occurs when a stallion maintains exclusive mating rights within a defendable territory. Males with better territories, those which best fit the requirements of estrous females, have higher breeding success (Orrians 1969; Rubenstein 1986; Ginsberg 1988).

Indigenous and introduced populations of the six species of equids inhabit a variety of desert/steppe and savannah ecosystems in temperate and tropical regions. Harems are typically found in relatively mesic environments. Female membership within groups is static and a dominance hierarchy exists between females (horses - Berger 1986, Duncan et al. 1984; Grant's zebra [*E. burchelli boehmi*] Klingel 1975, Gakathu 1984; and Mountain and Hartmann's zebra [*E. zebra*] Joubert 1972, Penzhorn 1975).

Resource defense polygamy occurs under xeric conditions when one or more resources are limiting. Females form loose associations with other females that can last from several hours to several months. This ever changing social structure occurs in African asses (Moehlman 1974, 1979; Klingel 1977; Woodward 1979), Asiatic asses (Klingel 1975, 1977) and Grevy's zebra (Klingel 1967, 1974, 1975; Rubenstein 1986, 1989; Ginsberg 1988). Associations between

two adult Grevy's zebra lasted from 8 days between non-reproductive females to up to three months between lactating females (Ginsberg 1988). Associations noted between feral African asses are weaker; except for a female and her most recent offspring, two asses were rarely seen together for longer than one week (Moehlman 1974).

The social systems described above are malleable, studies of feral African asses and domestic horses have documented variations in the social systems typically found within these two species. On Assignees Is, a mesic area, female feral African asses formed closed membership groups which are defendable by single stallions (Moehlman 1979, Moehlman pers. comm.; McCort 1980). Feral horses on the Shackleford banks exhibit a variety of social groupings depending on female movement patterns and intra-female social relationships (Rubenstein 1986). Females form long-term female-female associations in areas where forage is evenly distributed and less permanent associations where forage is unevenly distributed. Three types of mating-social systems are found: multi-female harems, male defended territories with groups of females, and (at least temporarily) monogamous male-female associations (Rubenstein 1986).

Reproductive requirements of Grevy's zebra

Because Grevy's zebra inhabit areas with variable