Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland

<http://journals.cambridge.org/TRA>

Additional services for *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)

XXV.—Description of the Wild Dog of the Western Gháts

W. H. Sykes

Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland / Volume 3 / Issue 03 / July 1834, pp 405 - 411

DOI: 10.1017/S0950473700001142, Published online: 24 September 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0950473700001142

How to cite this article:

W. H. Sykes (1834). XXV.—Description of the Wild Dog of the Western Gháts. Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 3, pp 405-411 doi:10.1017/S0950473700001142

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

XXV.—*Description of the Wild Dog of the Western Gháts.*—By Lieut.-Col.
W. H. SYKES, of the Bombay Army, F.L.S., F.G.S., &c.

Communicated by the Branch ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY of BOMBAY.

Read the 4th February 1832.

THE very limited accounts of the varieties of the Wild Dog to be met with in SHAW's Zoology, in BLUMENBACH's admirable Manual of Natural History, and in the splendid edition of CUVIER's *Règne Animal*, now publishing in England, in REES's Cyclopædia, and in one or two other works within my reach, lead me to believe that the accompanying drawing and description of the Wild Dog of the Western Gháts may prove acceptable to the Society.

In SHAW's Zoology, the only description of a Wild Dog is that of the "*Chien Sauvage de Ceylon*," by VOSMAER. Our Wild Dog is readily distinguished from this variety by its greater size, and by its having a bushy tail. In BLUMENBACH's work, general mention only is made of the Wild Dog, without any particular description of it. In REES's Cyclopædia, mention is made of Wild Dogs being found in large troops in Congo, Lower Ethiopia, and towards the Cape of Good Hope; some are said to be red-haired, with slender bodies and tails turned up like greyhounds; others resemble hounds of various colours, have erect ears, are of the size of a large fox-hound, destroy cattle, and hunt down antelopes and other animals: they run swiftly, go in large packs, attack lions, tigers, and elephants, and commit terrific ravages amongst the sheep of the Hottentots; but there is not an individual description.

In the "*Règne Animal*," the *Dhole* of the East-Indies and Southern Africa is described as being like the *Dingo* or half reclaimed dog of New Holland, but differs from it in the hairs of the tail not being bushy. In this particular it differs also from the Wild Dog of our Gháts, but corresponds nearly in colour with it, being of a uniform bright red. The *Dingo*, or New Holland half wild dog, has the head and elongated snout of a fox; in its other proportions it agrees with the shepherd's dog, which by some zoologists is considered the nearest of the domesticated dogs to the

primitive race. The fur of the *Dingo* is composed of silky and woolly hairs, and is of a deep yellowish brown colour, lighter on the under part of the body; it is about two feet six inches long, and two feet high.

It will be observed, that in the above distinguished works, descriptions are given of only two varieties of wild dogs: those of Ceylon, and those of India and Southern Africa.

I have deemed it necessary to preface my description with the above extracts, to facilitate comparison, and the estimate of the truth of the inference I have drawn, that the Wild Dog of the Western Gháts is hitherto an undescribed species.

In the afternoon of the 15th of May 1828, when encamped at *Bhima Shancar*, the source of the *Bhima* River, in the Western Gháts, some of the *Cohli* inhabitants of the village, who had been in my employ for some days hunting game, brought to me the Wild Dog, of which the accompanying is a drawing;* they called it *Colsun*. The creature was dead, but still warm; they stated that they had followed a pack of them in the morning, through the dense jungle, and ultimately coming unawares upon them, had struck down the dog they brought by a blow on the head with a stick, the creature not having activity sufficient to effect its escape. We were enabled to account for this inactivity on opening the stomach, by finding that the dog had completely gorged itself with the remains of a deer; and the bones of the feet of some digitate animal were also in the stomach. As it lay dead on the ground, its principal characteristics were: 1st, the length and narrowness of the head, the parietal bones insensibly approaching each other, and the jaws being considerably elongated; 2dly, the length and slenderness of the body; 3dly, the magnitude and strength of the limbs compared with those of other dogs of nearly the same size as the Wild Dog, and with the body of the dog itself; 4thly, the length of the neck; 5thly, the magnitude of the feet and toes. The expression of the face was that of a coarse ill-humoured *pariah* dog. The pupils of the eyes were round (the irides brown), ears large, erect, broad above and somewhat rounded at the tips, interior surface of the ears hairy, and the hairs whitish. The posterior margin of the ear has a lobe, fissure, or double edge, as in the domestic dog. The fore feet have five toes, and there is an elevated, rounded, horny process behind the articulation of the wrist, as in the *Shakal*,

* See the accompanying Plate.

and in two domestic dogs in my possession, one of them a powerful *Brinjari* of the greyhound form; the other out of an English spaniel by a *pariah*: the claws are short, stout, and black. The colour is a uniform bright red, from the tip of the nose to the insertion of the tail, and to the extremities of the toes; a shade or so, however, lighter under the throat, on the chest, belly, and on the inner surface of the fore legs down to the wrist. The tail is bushy, the hairs red at the base, but black at the tip; the fur consists of silky and woolly hairs, the latter very short, without any disposition to curl.

The proportions of the animal are: from the tip of the nose to between the ears, seven inches and three-quarters; greatest width of the head, three inches and a half; length from between the ears to the insertion of the tail, twenty-six inches, of which the neck is eight inches; length from the claws to the articulation of the ulna with the humerus, ten inches and a half; toes two inches long by eight-tenths of an inch high; tail eleven inches; height of the animal about seventeen inches; the extreme length from the nose to the tip of the tail, is three feet eight inches and three-quarters. I have stated the height indeterminately, from some provoking difficulties having occurred to prevent me setting the animal up correctly. From the extreme rarity of specimens of the Wild Dog, I was particularly anxious to prepare the skin properly: it was removed from the body with every possible care, leaving in the necessary bones of the head and limbs; and the interior surface was fully imbued with arsenical paste. The skin was then filled with dry grass, and the specimen put into a basket with some skins of the *moschus memina*, to be set up on my return to Poona. Having taken up my monsoon quarters, the skin of the dog was steeped in tepid water, and the usual process of stuffing with cotton and putting in wires was attempted; to my utter surprise, the skin in many places opposed as little resistance to pressure or tension as wetted brown paper would have done. The cause of the decomposition was perfectly inexplicable, as the skins of the small deer, similarly prepared and similarly circumstanced, were found to be quite sound. The misfortune effectually prevented me from setting the dog on its legs, with the body at its natural elevation, and I am necessitated, therefore, to speak of its height indeterminately. The head is in excellent preservation; the body is sufficiently so to give its true form and magnitude, and the limbs, although the skin has given way in certain places, have

so defined an outline as to admit of their being drawn correctly; the feet are quite perfect.

The drawing has been executed from actual measurements, but in the uncertainty of the height of the animal relatively to its length, I caused the drawing to be considerably foreshortened. It does not, therefore, show the real length of the body; but in *the position* in which it is represented standing, it may be relied upon for its correctness.

From the above description it will be observed, that the Wild Dog of our Gháts cannot be identified with any dog of which a description is given in the works of natural history to which I have alluded. It differs from the *Dhole* in having a bushy tail; from the "*Chien Sauvage de Ceylon*" in its bushy tail and superior size; from the African Wild Dog (likened to a large fox-hound), in its inferior size; and from the *Dingo* of New Holland, in its inferior height, general proportions, and colour; from the *Shakal* it is readily distinguished by its superior size, length of body, size of its limbs, and by its colour.*

If naturalists will not admit of there being several *species* of the Wild Dog, we must class the *Colsun* as an hitherto undescribed variety.

The *Cohli* inhabitants of the Gháts appear to be quite aware of the existence of troops of these Wild Dogs in their jungles and fastnesses; but from the fabulous stories they relate of them, they cannot be familiar with their habits and economy. They state that these dogs hunt the royal tiger in large packs; in the combat they urine on their own tails and switch them into the eyes of the royal beast; the tiger is blinded, and in consequence is ultimately vanquished. Independently of the testimony of these people, respecting its being the habit of Wild Dogs to hunt in packs, on the day the specimen described was brought to me, GORAL, one of my *hamáls*, and two other men, when going for water to a reservoir in the jungle, had their path crossed by ten of these dogs, apparently in full chase. The general testimony of travellers is in favour of their gregarious and venatic habits.

The habitat of the *Colsun* would appear not to be confined to *Bhíma Shancar* and its neighbourhood, as one of my office people from *Cittúr*, in the Southern Mahratta country, instantly recognized it as an inhabitant of

* Lieut.-Colonel Sykes subsequently named the *Colsun*, "*Canis Deccanensis*."—*Vide* Proceedings of the Zoological Society, July 12th 1831. "*Can. rufus, subtus pallidior: cauda comosa pendente: pupilla rotundatâ.*"

the jungles and hills about *Cittûr*, calling it also by the same name of *Colsun* given to it by the people of *Bhîma Shancar*. The people to the southward have also marvellous tales of its prowess and address.

A gentleman at the head of the Deccan Survey vouches for the existence of the Wild Dog, similar to my specimen, in the Southern Mahratta States, as in the prosecution of his duties he once came upon a troop of them under a tree, grouped in various positions; they were too vigilant however to let him get a shot at them. Wild Dogs exist also in the neighbourhood of the hill-fort of *Asîrgarh*, some officers of the 23d Regiment Bombay Native Infantry having seen a pack in full pursuit of a wild buffalo. They are met with on the *Nilagiris*, and a gentleman recently from those mountains, to whom I showed my specimen, identified it with the Wild Dog of those elevated regions.

Poona, August 1st, 1828.

W. H. SYKES,
Major.

Since writing the above, I am enabled to state that Captian OAKES, of the Bombay Army, had a *Colsun* in his possession alive for a considerable time, and was never able to subdue its natural savageness in the slightest degree.

Bombay, January 21st, 1831.

W. H. S.

As corroborative of the preceding description, and as shewing that the same animal is to be met with in other parts of India, the following observations by THOMAS H. BABER, Esq., and Colonel HENRY J. BOWLER, may be found interesting.

“The only account I have met with of the Wild Dog in India, is that given by Captain WILLIAMSON in his “Oriental Field Sports,” which to the best of my recollection corresponds with this of Colonel SYKES. It is also quite the same, in all its features and characters, as those which I have frequently observed in the western coast, and in the *Balaghât* district, where they are very numerous. As often as I have met with them, they have invariably been in packs of from thirty to perhaps sixty. They must be very formidable, as all animals are very much afraid of them. Frequently, remains of hogs and deer have been brought to me, which had been taken the over night by these Wild Dogs. The natives say they kill tigers and *chîtas*, and there is no doubt of the fact. It is quite correct that they are found in the

Nilagiris, though only in the western parts. I myself was followed, while travelling between the *Paitira* river and *Naddibatt*, a distance of eight or nine miles, by a pack of them, and had I not repeatedly fired off my pistols they would certainly have carried away three or four terriers and Spanish dogs that were following me at the time. Two or three times I succeeded in getting young ones, but I did not keep them longer than three or four weeks, they were so very wild as well as shy. It was only at night that they would eat, and then most voraciously. In the formation of their claws there was a difference from that of the wolf or *shakal*, resembling more the feline than the canine species, and this will account for the circumstance of these dogs always attacking and tearing out the eyes of their prey."

(Signed) T. H. BABER.

The *Colsun* described by Colonel SYKES is also common in the Hyderábád territory, and in most parts of the Deccan, also along the whole extent of the woody country in the districts of Ellúr and Rájamahendrí, and in part of Ganjam, on the eastern or Coromandel coast.

In the interior of the Deccan, they have been frequently seen by sporting gentlemen, but nearer the eastern coast they are generally shy. The *Shicúris* call it, in Hindustání, *Jangali Cutta*; and in Telugu, *Adavi Cucca*, both meaning the Wild Dog. They frequently hunt in packs, and are considered tolerably fleet. To one of these hunts I was once indebted for a haunch of venison, which proved, after the hard run the animal had had, most excellent eating. Early one morning, during a military tour in the Ganjam district, my attention was suddenly attracted by a loud hallooing and shouting amongst the followers, a short distance in the rear. Conceiving they were attacked by robbers, the strip of country on the left being rather wild, I galloped back, and rejoined them just in time to see the termination of one of these hunts. A fine buck antelope was observed bounding through an extensive, low, scattered jungle, and clumps of wild myrtle bushes, closely pursued by ten or twelve of these Wild Dogs. He was so hard pressed by them, that just as I came up, he dashed into a small tank near the road side, but it being shallow, with a muddy bottom, he plunged and could make no progress, and would, in that situation, soon have fallen an easy prey to the pack, had they not been alarmed and frightened away by the noise and shouting of the camp followers.

A friend of mine, Major PEW, killed two of these dogs in the Rájamahendrí district, and from him I have obtained the following description of them, which I think nearly accords with that furnished to the Society by Colonel SYKES.

Colour—Reddish brown.

Hair—Rather longer than that of the common *Pariah* dog.

Tail—Bushy, more resembling that of a *shakal* than a dog.

Ears—More rounded than those of dogs usually are, and more resembling those of the feline race.

Feet—Particularly round.

These animals scarcely stood so high as a *shakal*, but were much stouter and heavier in all respects.

(Signed) H. J. BOWLER.