

# A new pig for Tsavo

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There are only two species of warthog, and both occur in Kenya; the common warthog *Phacochoerus africanus* and the desert warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus*. Little is known about the natural history of the desert warthog—indeed, the desert warthog might well

be Africa's least-known, non-forest, large mammal. The morphological differences between the two species of warthog are described by Grubb (1993) and by d'Huart & Grubb (2005). The most diagnostic and noticeable characteristics for both species are summarized in Box 1.

d'Huart & Grubb (2001) compiled a map depicting the geographical range of both the common warthog and the desert warthog in the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia,

Uganda and Kenya). Their findings were summarized in 2002 by Boy in *Swara* 25—1: 20-21. The authors found the desert warthog to occur from Puntland (northern Somalia) southwestward through Somalia and southeastern Ethiopia to central and eastern Kenya. The only sites shown on the map for Kenya were Moyale, El Wak, Merelle ('midway between Archer's Post and Mt Marsabit'), and Mkokoni (in the Kiunga Marine Reserve). The southernmost

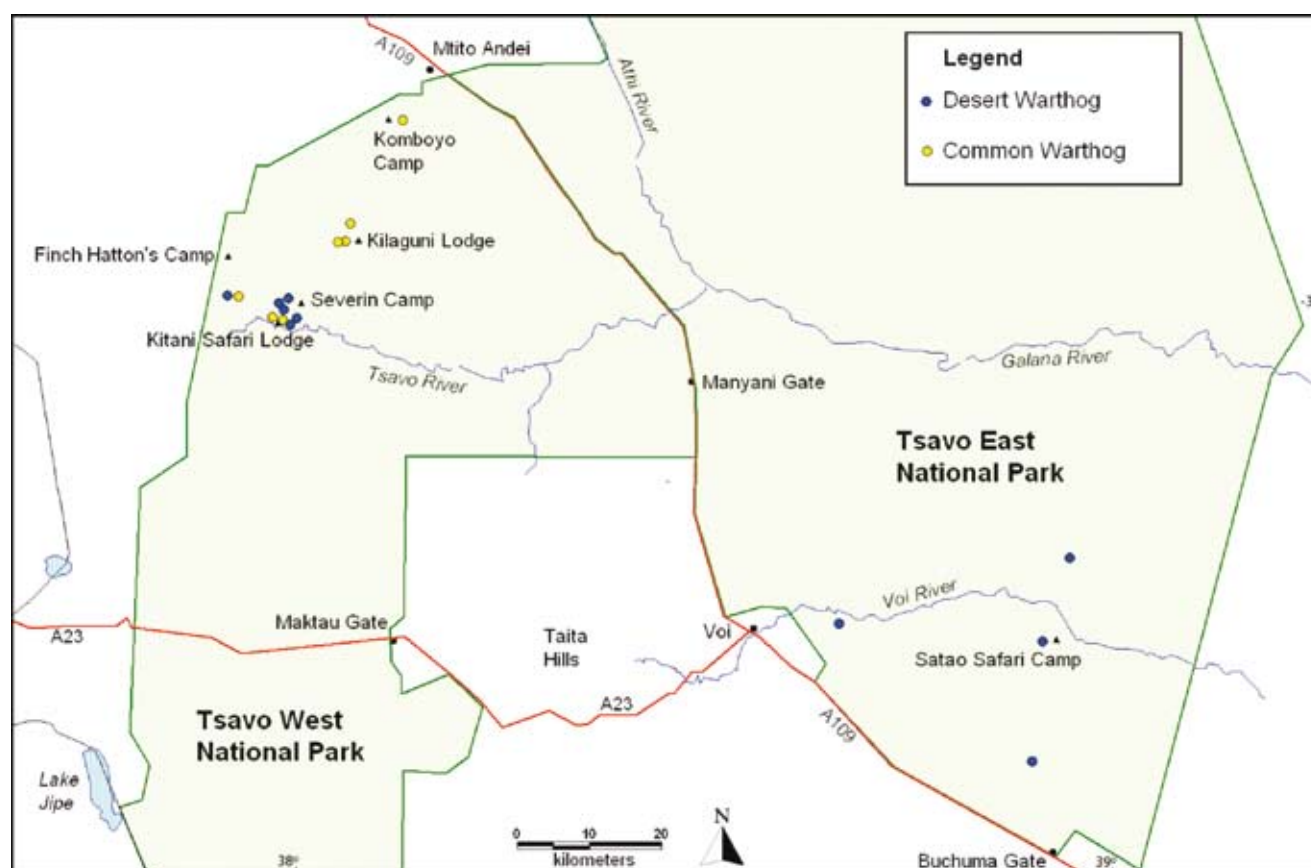
**How to most readily differentiate the desert warthog from the common warthog in the field** (d'Huart & Grubb 2005). See Figures 1 and 2.

- 1. Warts**—Adult desert warthog has a hook-shaped wart under the eye. Adult common warthog has a cone-shaped wart under the eye.
- 2. Ears**—Ear tips of desert warthog are bent backwards. Ear tips of common warthog are erect.
- 3. Suborbital area**—Suborbital area (ie, under the eye) appears swollen in adult desert warthog. In adult common warthog this swelling is absent.
- 4. Head**—Head of desert warthog is 'egg-shaped' when viewed from the front. Head of common warthog is slightly 'diabolo-shaped' when viewed from the front.



**Figure 1. Adult male common warthog *Phacochoerus africanus* on the open plains of the Laikipia Plateau, central Kenya. Note the cone shaped warts, pointed ears, and the diabolo-shaped head. Photograph by T. M. Butynski & Y. A. de Jong.**

**Figure 2. Adult male desert warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus* in medium dense shrub in Tsavo West National Park, southeast Kenya. Note the flipped-back ears, hooked warts, the broad, egg-shaped head, and the swollen suborbital area (area under the eyes). Photograph by T. M. Butynski & Y. A. de Jong.**



**Figure 3. Desert warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus* and common warthog *Phacochoerus africanus* localities in Tsavo East National Park and Tsavo West National Park, southeast Kenya.**

record for Kenya was from the Kiunga Marine Reserve, about 60 kilometres northeast of Lamu. All records were from north of the Ewaso Ng'iro River and east of the Tana River. They speculated that the two species would be found to overlap in some parts of their range, but found no evidence for this; their data show the shortest distance between common warthog and desert warthog records as 25 kilometres (in Puntland).

During a primate survey in 2005, TMB and YDJ encountered two solitary desert warthogs, 15 and 80 kilometres southwest of Garissa respectively, in medium dense acacia bushland. These encounters are important, as they are the first records of desert warthog west of the Tana River. Two questions remained, however. Are the desert warthog and common

warthog sympatric? How far south does the desert warthog occur?

On 7 June 2007, JC, JF and SBC traversed Tsavo East National Park. Briefed a few days earlier about desert warthog characteristics by TMB and YDJ, they travelled through the high-density tourism areas south of the Voi River, far to the southwest of the nearest confirmed desert warthog locations. Late that afternoon they were startled to find two adult desert warthogs in low scrub on the edge of the Dika Plains, just 13 kilometres north of Buchuma Gate, and managed to take a few photographs before the warthogs turned tail. They had just recorded a new large mammal species for Tsavo East National Park, and a major range extension of over 300 kilometres for the desert warthog!

The next day they returned to the area and located four more desert warthogs only nine kilometres from the Kenya Wildlife Service headquarters at Voi; one adult and three subadults stood their ground long enough for positive identification to be made and

for more photographs to be taken. What struck JC, JF and SBC immediately during these encounters was the overall shape of the animals' heads, the hooked warts, and the flipped-back tip of the ears (see Box 1), all of which are diagnostic, easily-seen field characters of the desert warthog. During this trip, no common warthogs were seen. All photographs were sent to experts for confirmation. Some of these, together with some of our other warthog photographs, are available on a digital map at [www.tinyurl.com/warthogMap](http://www.tinyurl.com/warthogMap).


In July 2007, JC returned briefly to Tsavo East National Park for two days. He observed two sounders of desert warthogs—each of four animals—in open shrubland north and south of the Voi River in the vicinity of Satao Safari Camp. Once again, no common warthogs were seen.

In October 2007, JC visited Tsavo West National Park for two days, where desert warthogs were found to be fairly common around Severin Safari Camp and Kitani

Safari Lodge, just to the north of the Tsavo River. Three desert warthogs were seen feeding in an open area along a major tourism circuit, permitting lengthy observation. One of these animals was a subadult male. Subadult desert warthogs, like adults, have ears that are flipped-back at the tips, and broader-based genal warts, allowing them to be differentiated in the field from common warthogs despite them lacking the hooked warts of adult male desert warthogs. During this visit JC also found common warthogs in Tsavo West National Park only a few hundred metres from where he observed desert warthogs.

In April, 2008, TMB and YDJ visited Tsavo West National Park for three days, and encountered common warthogs around Kilaguni Serena Safari Lodge, Komboyo Camp, Kitani Safari Lodge and Severin Safari Camp (including

areas where desert warthogs were seen during the earlier trip by JC). About six kilometres of Finch Hatton's Camp, in low bush on the edge of riverine forest, one group of desert warthogs (one adult male and three subadults) was encountered only 150 metres from six common warthogs. This sighting is not only the farthest range extension for desert warthog (390 kilometres) from Mikoni, the most southern record of d'Huart & Grubb, but it is also the first evidence that the two species of warthogs are sympatric.

Finding desert warthog in Tsavo, and finding them sympatric with common warthog, is exciting news for the species and for Kenya. Tsavo West National Park and Tsavo East National Park can add one more species to their list of large mammals. What further surprises can we expect from this long-overlooked pig? 

## References

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## Have you seen warthogs in Africa?

To better understand the distribution of Africa's warthogs, we would like to know if you have seen desert warthogs or common warthogs in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Uganda, Kenya or Tanzania. Details and/or a photograph of your record would be highly appreciated.

The following information is most important

- date of sighting
- species
- name of nearest village or town
- latitude and longitude
- elevation
- habitat

**Please send your information and/or photograph to:**

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 Nanyuki 10400, Kenya  
[yvonne@wildsolutions.nl](mailto:yvonne@wildsolutions.nl)  
 Thank you!  
 Your help is much appreciated!