

## **impossible2Possible, Botswana 2012, Academic Phase 1**

### **Gemsbok (also referred to as Oryx)**

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As my animal of discussion I chose the Gemsbok or as most people know it by the Oryx. To me the Gemsbok is most iconic animal of the Kalahari Desert. They can often be seen wandering the red sand dunes throughout the Kalahari. They are truly the antelope of the dessert. In Botswana Kgalagardi Transfrontier Park and Kalahari Gemsbok National Park in South Africa where named after them.

Gemsboks are easily recognizable by their long straight horns reaching over 120cm and their black and white masked faces. With such sticking features and large horns gemsbok are very highly prized as a top trophy animal for hunters. Especially in Botswana trophy hunting is large income for the economy. So the gemsbok is at the top of the list for one of the most prized trophy's. They are one of the largest in the antelope family. They stand about 1.2 m at the shoulder. The body length can vary from 190 to 240 cm and the tail measures 45 to 90 cm. Male Gemsbok can weigh between 220 and 300 kg, while females weigh 100–210 kg. They live in herds of about 10-40 animals, which consist of a dominant male, a few no dominate males, and females.

The gemsbok is perfectly adapted for the dessert. It is in fact considered a desert-dwelling mammal and do not depend on drinking to supply their physiological water needs. Due to the harsh temperatures in there environment they are have adapted with a special vain in their nostrils that cools the air temperature as they breath in the hot air. This helps to help prevent dehydration. The Gemsbok is a grazer, feeding mainly on the sparse dry desert grasses. If grass is not available they will browse and dig for roots, tubers and bulbs. They will feed early in the morning, late in the afternoon and on moonlit nights when the water content of the plants are at their highest. They will also eat wild melons and such for their water content. They are known to go for weeks without drinking water.

Just in the last two decades the gemsbok population has rebounded due to wide spread reintroduction programs. Their main cause to their decline was caused by sport hunting, bush meat hunting and habitat destruction. Especially in Botswana they compete with cattle grounds. They can be found in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe they are now possibly extinct in Angola.

Source: Cillie, B. The Mammal Guide of Southern Africa, 1997, Briza Publications, Pretoria, South Africa