

DNA-led rediscovery of a rare antelope

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The giant sable antelope (*Hippotragus niger variani*), unique to Angola, was feared extinct after almost three decades of civil war. Comparisons of mitochondrial DNA sequences derived from dung samples recently collected in the field and from old museum specimens of certain provenance provide the first documented evidence to date that this enigmatic antelope has survived. Its DNA-led rediscovery in the former combat zone was subsequently confirmed by photographic evidence. The Angolan isolate constitutes a distinct monophyletic group that shows a dramatic population decline from historic levels. It represents a diagnosable conservation unit which is characterized by unique cranial morphological features, a highly restricted range, and the presence of fixed genetic differences to all of its common relatives.



