

Ankole under threat of EXTINCTION

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Whilst I was in Uganda, the sight of truck after truck full of Ankole cattle destined for the abattoirs drove me to investigate the claims that Ankole cattle are at a critical conservation status. The answer as to why there is such a drastic decline in Ankole numbers is twofold: One from the propaganda, spread in the past by the Ugandan government and initiatives such as “one dairy cow per household” by Canadian, US and dairy consortiums from the Netherlands, going to Uganda and encouraging breeding and crossbreeding of European dairy breeds over native Ankole. These dairy consortiums have no knowledge of the value and potential of Ankole.

Secondly is the unsustainable and relentless daily slaughter of Ankole for horn product. The Ankole horn is misleadingly conveniently labelled an “ethically sourced by-product” although the truth is that the Ankole cattle’s (which are slaughtered) highest value is in their horns only, as most of the cattle held very little meat as there are no feedlots in Uganda where they can be properly fed.

It was hard to find the national Ugandan Ankole herd number as no one actually knows.

The closest I could get is 1 million or less. They are slaughtered at an alarming and unsustainable rate. This excludes what is lost due to crossbreeding. Studies suggest that if Ankole in Uganda continue to be lost at the rate they are today they can be extinct in Uganda in less than 20 years. Keeping in mind there are very few of the Ugandan quality Ankole outside of its borders. Soon the only Ankole left, if they are not later poached, may only be in Lake Maburo National Park, Ziwa Rhino sanctuary, Ol Pejeta conservancy and South Africa. Like with Rhino, when the horn is perceived to be worth

more than the live animal it becomes a serious issue of conservation.

In Uganda, a five-year, \$8 million dairy-modernisation project was completed, and about half the money went toward artificial insemination. This means that over \$4 million dollars went to artificially inseminating local cattle breeds with dairy semen straws.

Many tropical breeds, such as Ankole, possess unique adaptive traits. The problem is that we do not fully understand or know what is being lost. The U.N.’s Food and Agriculture Organisation released a global assessment of biodiversity in livestock and found that one breed per month has gone extinct over the last six years.

Ankole are geographically isolated. The 11 Ankole Longhorn cattle sub-populations can be considered to consist of four main groups with slight genetic distinctions. There are sub varieties of Ankole in South Sudan and Rwanda but the Ugandan Ankole are renowned for their large size and exceptional quality.

The Ugandan Wildlife Authority, a government agency in charge of wildlife management and other conservationists, have collected Ankole cattle and put them in Lake Mburo National Park for conservation purposes. The Ankole cattle are being looked at for their tourism potential. It is believed that if they are conserved in the National Park it may, in the near future, be one of the last places they can be found.

Conservation efforts worldwide are essential in preserving the valuable genetics varieties in the valuable Ankole bloodlines.