Description

The buffalo comes in two principal forms, the savanna and the forest (see following account). There are three recognised subspecies, West African (S. c. brachyceros), Central African (S. c. aequinoctialis) and southern savanna (S. c. caffer). Massively built, with relatively short and stocky legs, ears large and fringed with black hair. Massive black horns are variable “W” shaped in the front view and those of the bull heavier, often longer, and a heavy boss is present at base. Ears hang below horns. Adults sparsely haired and overall black in colour, younger animals brown.

Distribution

Wide sub-Saharan range, with the West African race extending from Senegal to central Cameroon, Central African race in southern Chad, CAR, extreme northern Congo DR and Sudan. Southern savanna across East Africa and much of central and southern Africa. Some of the biggest trophies come out of Tanzania, Zambia and Botswana.

Conservation standing

West African about 20,000, with the largest numbers in Senegal, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Benin and Cameroon. Central African numbers some 60,000 with most in Congo DR and the CAR. Most abundant is southern savanna with at least 550,000 animals.

Habitats

Open woodland savanna with abundant food grasses and access to water for drinking and wallowing. In some areas it utilises mountain forest but feeds in glades.

Behaviour

Sometimes forms into large herds numbering in the thousands. Most herds small and 50 to a few hundred strong. Large herds split into smaller groups, rejoining main body later. Small bachelor herds often encountered, as are solitary bulls. Within herds, of mixed sex and age, adult bulls maintain a dominance hierarchy. Cows also establish a hierarchical system amongst themselves. Herds occupy clearly defined home ranges, which rarely overlap. Most feeding takes place at night, but this may be extended on cool, overcast days. They usually drink in the early morning and late afternoon, lying up in the shade during the heat of the day.

Food

Grass makes up much of their food, showing a preference for grasses that grow in dense swards.

Breeding

Mating season: Seasonal breeders - associated with rains; Northern Botswana - October - April; Kruger January - April; East Africa - through year but with rainy season peaks.

Gestation: 340 days

Number of young: 1

Birth weight: 31 - 40 kg (68.3 - 88.2 lb)

Sexual maturity: Male at 3.5 years; first breed 7 - 10 years;
Female > 3 years (1st calf 4 - 5 years)

Longevity: One captive to 29 years 6 months

Measurements

Total length: 3.2 - 4.4 m (10.5' - 14.4')

Tail: > 70 cm (> 28”)

Shoulder Height: 1.4 m (4.6”)

Weight:

Male 700 kg (1,543 lb)
Female 550 kg (1,213 lb)

Rifles and Ammunition

Suggested Calibre: 9,3mm - .375 up. 9,3mm illegal in some countries.

Bullet: Expanding bullet designed for penetration; solids for followup.

Sights: Low-range variable scope or open “express” or aperture sights.

Hunting Conditions: Expect initial shots from 40 to 120 yards (37-110m)
African savanna buffalo bulls are one of Africa’s most sought after trophies.

African savanna buffalo bulls fighting

Typical horn form of Greater Addo bull

African savanna buffalo cows have lighter horns than the bulls

Buffalo frequently wallow in water and mud