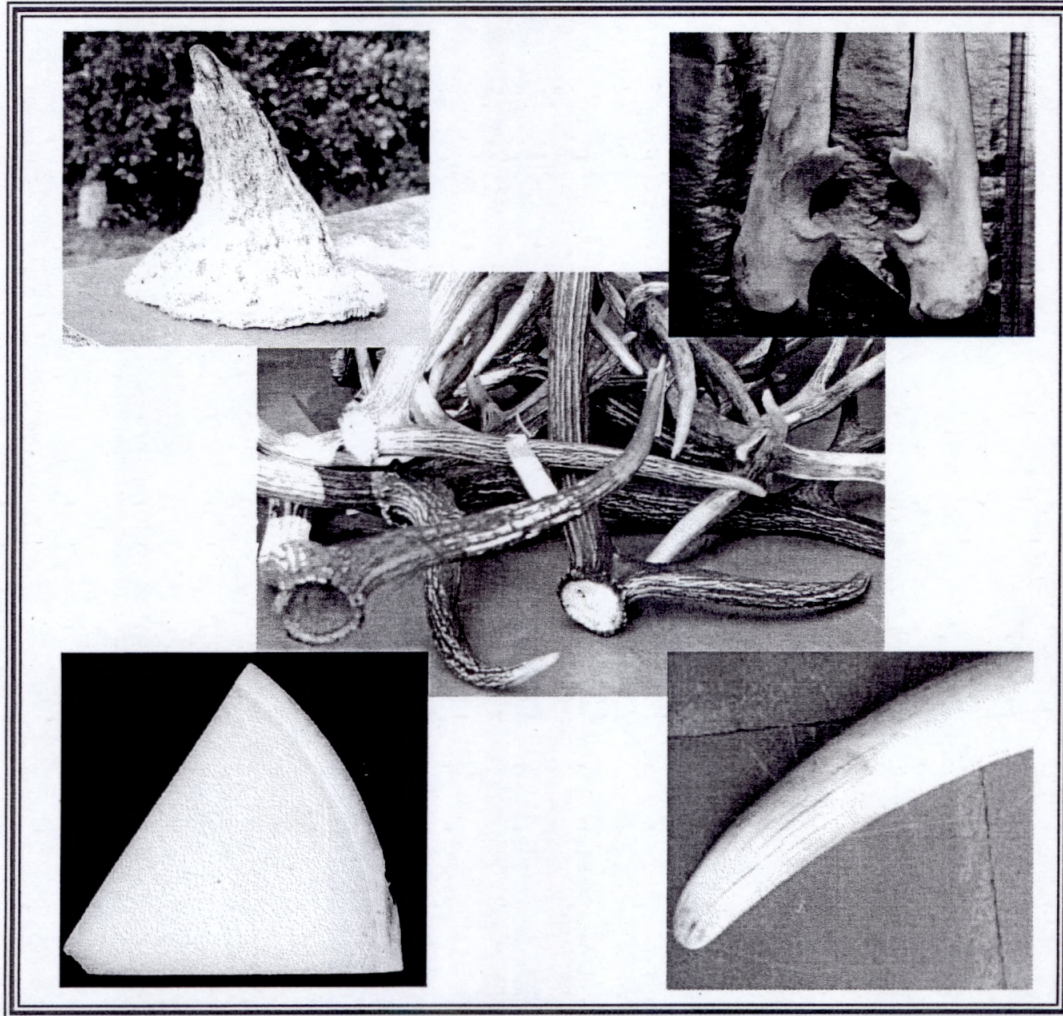


Research project titled “Characterization of species
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offence cases”

FINAL REPORT



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India

2008

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bone, tusk, rhino horn and antler to deal wildlife offence
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FINAL REPORT

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**भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
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| | | |
|---------|--|----|
| 2.4.1 | Morphometry-a basis for identifying major tiger and leopard bones | 28 |
| 2.4.1.1 | Morphological features | 28 |
| 2.4.1.2 | Morphometric measurements | 34 |
| 2.4.1.3 | Statistical approach for distinguishing bones of tiger and leopard | 36 |
| 2.4.2 | Scanning electron microscopic characteristics | 41 |
| 2.4.3 | X-ray diffraction characteristics | 43 |
| 2.4.4 | Thermo gravimetric characteristics | 44 |
| 2.4.5 | Elemental analysis | 46 |
| 2.4.5.1 | X-ray intensities of various elements based on XRF | 46 |
| 2.4.5.2 | Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry | 48 |
| 2.4.6 | DNA techniques | 50 |
| 2.5 | Discussion | 62 |
| 2.6 | References | 68 |

Chapter 3: Characterization of ivory

| | | |
|---------|---|----|
| 3.1 | Introduction | 75 |
| 3.2 | Objectives | 76 |
| 3.3 | Materials and methods | 76 |
| 3.3.1 | Morphometric characteristics of ivory | 77 |
| 3.3.2 | Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) | 78 |
| 3.3.3 | X-ray diffraction (XRD) | 79 |
| 3.3.4 | Thermo gravimetric analysis (TGA) | 79 |
| 3.3.5 | Elemental analysis | 80 |
| 3.3.5.1 | X-ray fluorescence (XRF) | 80 |
| 3.3.5.2 | Inductively coupled plasma-atomic emission spectrometry (ICP-AES) | 80 |
| 3.3.5.3 | Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry (ICP-MS) | 80 |
| 3.3.6 | DNA analysis | 81 |
| 3.3.7 | Isotopic analysis | 81 |
| 3.4 | Results | 82 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 3.4.1 | Schreger angle | 82 |
| 3.4.2 | Scanning electron microscopic characteristics | 84 |
| 3.4.3 | X-ray diffraction characteristics | 86 |
| 3.4.4 | Thermo gravimetric characteristics | 88 |
| 3.4.5 | Elemental analysis | 88 |
| | 3.4.5.1 X-ray intensities of various elements based on XRF | 89 |
| | 3.4.5.2 Inductively coupled plasma-atomic emission spectrometry | 90 |
| | 3.4.5.3 Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry | 91 |
| 3.4.6 | DNA techniques | 94 |
| 3.4.7 | Isotopic ratio analysis | 94 |
| 3.5 | Discussion | 98 |
| 3.6 | References | 102 |

Chapter 4: Characterization of rhinoceros horn

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 4.1 | Introduction | 106 |
| 4.2 | Objective | 111 |
| 4.3 | Materials and methods | 111 |
| | 4.3.1 Morphometry of rhinoceros horn | 111 |
| | 4.3.2 Scanning electron microscopy | 114 |
| | 4.3.3 X-ray diffraction | 114 |
| | 4.3.4 Thermo gravimetric analysis | 115 |
| | 4.3.5 Elemental analysis | 115 |
| | 4.3.5.1 X-ray fluorescence | 115 |
| | 4.3.5.2. Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry | 116 |
| | 4.3.6 Protein profile using sodium dodecyl sulfate poly acrylamide gel electrophoresis (SDS-PAGE) | 116 |
| | 4.3.7 DNA analysis | 117 |
| 4.4 | Results | 119 |
| | 4.4.1 Morphometry of rhinoceros horn | 119 |
| | 4.4.1.1 Morphological features | 119 |
| | 4.4.1.2 Statistical analysis | 122 |
| | 4.4.1.3 Density | 125 |

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| 4.4.2 | Scanning electron microscopy | 125 |
| 4.4.3 | X-ray diffraction characteristics | 128 |
| 4.4.4 | Thermo gravimetric characteristics | 130 |
| 4.4.5 | Elemental analysis | 132 |
| | 4.4.5.1 X-ray fluorescence | 132 |
| | 4.4.5.2. Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry | 132 |
| 4.4.6 | Protein profile | 135 |
| 4.4.7 | DNA techniques | 137 |
| 4.5 | Discussion | 146 |
| 4.6 | References | 154 |

Chapter 5: Characterization of antler

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 5.1 | Introduction | 159 |
| 5.2 | Objective | 164 |
| 5.3 | Materials and methods | 164 |
| | 5.3.1 Morphometric and histological differentiation of antler | 165 |
| | 5.3.2 Scanning electron microscopy | 166 |
| | 5.3.3 X-ray diffraction | 167 |
| | 5.3.4 Thermo gravimetric analysis | 167 |
| | 5.3.5. Elemental analysis | 167 |
| | 5.3.5.1. X-ray fluorescence | 167 |
| | 5.3.5.2. Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry | 167 |
| | 5.3.6 DNA analysis | 168 |
| 5.4 | Results | 169 |
| | 5.4.1 Morphometric and cross sectional differentiation | 169 |
| | 5.4.1.1 Morphological features | 169 |
| | 5.4.1.2 Statistical analysis | 177 |
| | 5.4.1.3 Cross-sections | 179 |
| | 5.4.2 Scanning electron microscopic characteristics | 180 |
| | 5.4.3 X-ray diffraction characteristics | 182 |
| | 5.4.4 Thermo gravimetric characteristics | 186 |
| | 5.4.5. Elemental analysis | 190 |
| | 5.4.5.1. X-ray fluorescence | 190 |
| | 5.4.5.2. Inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry | 193 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| 5.4.5.3. Analytical approaches | 195 |
| 5.4.6 DNA techniques | 197 |
| 5.5 Discussion | 216 |
| 5.6 References | 226 |

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LIST OF FIGURES

| Fig. no. | Title of the Figure | Page |
|-----------------|--|-------------|
| Fig. 2.1 | Variables used for scapula measurements (source Drisch 1976) | 21 |
| Fig. 2.2 | Variables used for pelvic measurements | 22 |
| Fig. 2.3 | Measurement of selected variables of humerus. | 23 |
| Fig. 2.4 | Variables used for femur measurements | 24 |
| Fig. 2.5 | Cranial measurements for tiger and leopard skulls | 34 |
| Fig. 2.6 | Scatter plot showing differences in the measurements of tiger and leopard femur | 39 |
| Fig. 2.7 | Scatter plots indicate differences between humerus of tiger and leopard | 41 |
| Fig. 2.8 | Scanning micrographs to distinguish outer portion of tiger and leopard femur | 41 |
| Fig. 2.9 | Scanning micrographs of cortex portion of tiger and leopard femur | 42 |
| Fig. 2.10 | Scanning micrographs of core portion of tiger and leopard femur | 42 |
| Fig. 2.11 | X-ray diffractogram to distinguish bone of tiger and leopard | 43 |
| Fig. 2.12 | Thermographs of tiger and leopard bones | 44 |
| Fig. 2.13 | Weight loss in relation to temperature in tiger and leopard bones | 45 |
| Fig. 2.14 | Percent water loss at 100 ⁰ C and total weight left at 1400 ⁰ C | 45 |
| Fig. 2.15 | X-ray intensities (KCps) of various elements in tiger and leopard bones | 47 |
| Fig. 2.16 | Mean concentration of Ca, Fe, Mg, Na, Pb, V, Ni, Cr, Co, Cu, Ba and Sr in bones of tiger and leopard | 48 |
| Fig. 2.17 | DNA extraction from bones of tiger and leopard | 51 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|----|
| Fig. 2.18 | PCR of DNA extracted from both the above methods | 51 |
| Fig. 2.19 | Sequence of tiger using 16S rRNA primer | 52 |
| Fig. 2.20 | Alignment of DNA sequences of cytochrome b of mitochondrial gene of <i>Panthera tigris</i> and <i>Panthera pardus</i> | 54 |
| Fig. 2.21 | Alignment of DNA sequences of 16S rRNA of mitochondrial gene of <i>Panthera tigris</i> and <i>Panthera pardus</i> | 55 |
| Fig. 2.22 | Restriction enzyme map of leopard cytochrome b gene generated using Webcutter 2 | 56 |
| Fig. 2.23 | Restriction enzyme map of tiger cytochrome b gene generated using Webcutter 2 | 57 |
| Fig. 3.1 | Tusk dentine portion showing concave and convex Schreger angles. | 78 |
| Fig. 3.2 | Scanning Electron Microscope and Sputter coater | 79 |
| Fig. 3.3 | Relationship of elephant tusk circumference with outer Schreger angle | 82 |
| Fig. 3.4 | Use of Schreger angle for species differentiation | 83 |
| Fig. 3.5 | Mean of Schreger angle (from all three portions of tusk) Asian and African elephant ivory | 83 |
| Fig. 3.6 | Variation in Schreger angle at various zone of African and Asian elephant ivory | 84 |
| Fig. 3.7 | Scanning micrographs at enamel portion of Asian and African elephant ivory | 84 |
| Fig. 3.8 | Scan micrograph of Asian and African elephant ivory on dentine portion | 85 |
| Fig. 3.9 | X-ray diffraction pattern to distinguish Asian and African elephant ivory | 86 |
| Fig. 3.10 | Distinction between ivory and antler using cell parameter | 87 |
| Fig. 3.11 | Thermograph of ivory | 88 |

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Fig. 3.12 | Difference in weight loss pattern of Asian and African ivory | 89 |
| Fig. 3.13 | Mean concentration of Fe, Mg, Sr, Si, Ba, Mn, Zn, and Cr by ICP-AES in Asian and African elephant ivory | 90 |
| Fig. 3.14 | Concentration of Co, Mo, Rb, Zr, Cr, Cu, Ni and V in Asian and African ivory by ICP-MS | 92 |
| Fig. 3.15 | Concentration of La, Ce, Pr, Nd, Sm, Eu, Nb, Th, Gd, Tb, Dy, Ho, Er, Tm, Yb, Lu, Sc, and Y in Asian and African elephant ivory by ICP-MS | 93 |
| Fig. 3.16 | Relationship between $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ of collagen and tusk powder of Asian elephant | 95 |
| Fig. 3.17 | Mean and standard error of carbon and nitrogen isotope of Asian and African elephant ivory | 96 |
| Fig. 3.18 | Relationship between circumference of tusk and diet of Asian elephants in grass dominating habitat | 96 |
| Fig. 3.19 | Relationship between mean δN and average annual rainfall | 97 |
| Fig. 3.20 | Error bars showing Asian elephant tusk having high and low nitrogen isotope ratio in various region. | 97 |
| Fig. 3.21 | Scatter plot formed by mean isotopic ratios of strontium, carbon and nitrogen. | 98 |
| Fig. 4.1 | Different horns of rhinoceros used for morphometric studies | 114 |
| Fig. 4.2 | Morphometric characteristics of dorsal surface of rhinoceros horn | 120 |
| Fig. 4.3 | Morphometric characteristics of ventral surface of rhinoceros horn | 121 |
| Fig. 4.4 | Differences based on circumference/weight of rhino horn | 121 |
| Fig. 4.5 | Canonical Discriminant Function to differentiate real horn from zoo and fake rhinoceros horns | 125 |
| Fig. 4.6 | Scan micrographs of dorsal portion of horns | 126 |
| Fig. 4.7 | Scan micrographs of ventral portion of horns | 127 |

| | | |
|-----------|--|-----|
| Fig. 4.8 | Diffraction patterns of horns | 129 |
| Fig. 4.9 | Thermograph of rhinoceros horn | 131 |
| Fig. 4.10 | Intensities of different elements in rhinoceros horn using XRF | 132 |
| Fig. 4.11 | Variation in element concentration determined based on ICP-MS in great one rhinoceros horn | 134 |
| Fig. 4.12 | Protein profile and cluster analysis of the band observed | 136 |
| Fig. 4.13 | Quality of DNA and PCR amplification of rhinoceros horn | 138 |
| Fig. 4.14 | DNA sequence alignment of <i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i> at cytochrome b gene with <i>Bos taurus</i> and <i>Bubalus bubalis</i> | 140 |
| Fig. 4.15 | Restriction map of <i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i> for cytochrome b gene | 141 |
| Fig. 4.16 | Restriction map of <i>Bos taurus</i> for cytochrome b gene | 142 |
| Fig. 4.17 | Restriction map of <i>Bubalus bubalis</i> for cytochrome b gene | 143 |
| Fig. 5.1 | Angles used for characterization of antler | 166 |
| Fig. 5.2 | Target regions selected for DNA extraction from antler | 168 |
| Fig. 5.3 | Differences between shed and unshed antlers | 170 |
| Fig. 5.4 | Characteristics of antler | 170 |
| Fig. 5.5 | Branching patterns of antlers in selected deer species | 170 |
| Fig. 5.6 | First angle of antler of different species | 171 |
| Fig. 5.7 | Distribution of first angle measurement of antlers in different species | 172 |
| Fig. 5.8 | Second angle of antler of different species | 173 |
| Fig. 5.9 | Distribution of second angle measurement of antler in different species | 174 |
| Fig. 5.10 | Error bars showing mean and confidence interval in both first and second tine angles | 175 |

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Fig. 5.11 | Scatter plot of angles of antler of different species | 176 |
| Fig. 5.12 | Canonical Discriminant Functions to distinguish antlers of different species | 179 |
| Fig. 5.13 | Cross section of antlers of different species | 180 |
| Fig. 5.14 | SEM micrographs of outer portion of antlers of selected deer species | 180 |
| Fig. 5.15 | Scan micrographs at cortex portion of antlers of deer species | 181 |
| Fig. 5.16 | Scan micrographs pattern of antler at core portion of different deer species | 182 |
| Fig. 5.17 | Observed difference among ivory and antler using background intensities | 182 |
| Fig. 5.18 | X-ray diffractogram of antlers of different deer species | 183 |
| Fig. 5.19 | Dendrogram generated using cluster analysis indicating differences among deer species based on presence and absence of x-ray diffraction peaks in antler. | 186 |
| Fig. 5.20 | Nature of weight loss in antler of deer species | 187 |
| Fig. 5.21 | Percent total weight left and water loss from antlers of different deer species | 187 |
| Fig. 5.22 | Thermographs of antlers of different deer species | 189 |
| Fig. 5.23 | XRF intensity (KCps) of elements in antlers of different deer species | 192 |
| Fig. 5.24 | Composition of mean concentrations of various elements in antlers of deer species | 193 |
| Fig. 5.25 | Canonical Discriminant Functions to distinguish antlers of different species | 196 |
| Fig. 5.26 | DNA extraction from antlers using sodium acetate precipitation method | 198 |
| Fig. 5.27 | Amplification of DNA template from core portion of sambar | 199 |

antler with cytochrome b gene (186 bp) on 2% agarose gel

| | | |
|-----------|---|-----|
| Fig. 5.28 | Alignment of DNA sequence of cytochrome b gene of mitochondrial DNA of deer species | 201 |
| Fig. 5.29 | Alignment of DNA sequence of 16S rRNA gene of mitochondrial DNA of deer species | 203 |
| Fig. 5.30 | Restriction enzyme map of cytochrome b region of <i>Axis axis</i> | 204 |
| Fig. 5.31 | Restriction enzyme map of cytochrome b region of <i>Cervus unicolor</i> | 205 |
| Fig. 5.32 | Restriction enzyme map of cytochrome b region of <i>Cervus duvauceli</i> | 206 |
| Fig. 5.33 | Restriction enzyme map of <i>Axis axis</i> 16S rRNA gene generated using Webcutter 2 | 210 |
| Fig. 5.34 | Restriction enzyme map of <i>Cervus unicolor</i> 16S rRNA gene generated using Webcutter 2 | 211 |
| Fig. 5.35 | Restriction enzyme map of <i>Cervus duvauceli</i> 16S rRNA gene generated using Webcutter 2 | 213 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table no. | Title of the Table | Page |
|------------------|--|-------------|
| Table 2.1 | Number of samples analyzed for morphometric measurements and different analytical techniques | 18 |
| Table 2.2 | Variables used in skull measurements | 19 |
| Table 2.3 | Variables used for measurements of scapula | 20 |
| Table 2.4 | Variables used for measurements of pelvic | 20 |
| Table 2.5 | Selected variables for measurement of humerus characteristics | 23 |
| Table 2.6 | Selected variables used for measurements of femur | 24 |
| Table 2.7 | Differences between tiger and leopard skulls | 29 |
| Table 2.8 | Differences in scapula between tiger and leopard | 32 |
| Table 2.9 | Cranial measurements important for distinguishing tiger and leopard skulls | 34 |
| Table 2.10 | Variables used in the analysis | 36 |
| Table 2.11 | Eigenvalues | 36 |
| Table 2.12 | Variables involved in the Function | 37 |
| Table 2.13 | Fisher's linear discriminant functions (Classification Function Coefficients) | 37 |
| Table 2.14 | Variables used in the analysis | 38 |
| Table 2.15 | Eigenvalues | 38 |
| Table 2.16 | Variable involved in the analysis | 38 |
| Table 2.17 | Fisher's linear discriminant functions (Classification Function Coefficients) | 39 |
| Table 2.18 | Descriptive statistics of humerus of tiger | 40 |
| Table 2.19 | Descriptive statistics of humerus of leopard | 40 |

| | | |
|------------|--|-----|
| Table 2.20 | Variables used in the analysis | 49 |
| Table 2.21 | Eigenvalues | 49 |
| Table 2.22 | Variables involve in function | 49 |
| Table 2.23 | Fisher's linear discriminant function (Classification Function Coefficients) | 50 |
| Table 2.24 | Restriction enzyme which are cutting partial fragment of cytochrome b gene of tiger and leopard at different sites | 58 |
| Table 2.25 | Restriction enzyme which are cutting partial fragment of 16S rRNA gene of tiger and leopard at different sites | 60 |
| Table 2.26 | Primer developed for tiger and leopard DNA using Primer 3 software of cytochrome b region | 61 |
| Table 2.27 | Primer developed for tiger and leopard DNA using Primer 3 software of 16S rRNA region | 62 |
| Table 2.28 | Ranking order of different techniques for identifying species from bones of tiger and leopard | 67 |
| Table 3.1 | Number of ivory samples analyzed for morphometric and different analytical techniques | 77 |
| Table 3.2 | Grayscale pixel intensity of micrographs | 85 |
| Table 3.3 | Range of crystallite size of different sample | 87 |
| Table 3.4 | Cell parameter and cell volume of ivory | 87 |
| Table 3.5 | Mean elemental concentration of Asian (n=5) & African elephant ivory (n=3) calculated through ICP-AES in parts per million | 91 |
| Table 3.6 | Ranking order of different techniques for identifying species from ivory | 102 |
| Table 4.1 | Different techniques and number of samples used to characterize rhinoceros and other horns | 111 |

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| Table 4.2 | Different qualitative and quantitative measurements used for rhinoceros horns | 113 |
| Table 4.3 | Angles (mean \pm SD) observed in real and fake rhinoceros horns | 122 |
| Table 4.4 | Values (mean \pm SD) of dorsal and ventral circumference of rhinoceros and fake horns | 122 |
| Table 4.5 | Variables used in the analysis | 123 |
| Table 4.6 | Eigenvalues | 123 |
| Table 4.7 | Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients | 123 |
| Table 4.8 | Fisher's linear discriminant functions (Classification Function Coefficients) | 124 |
| Table 4.9 | Concentration of elements in ppm of rhinoceros horn analysed through ICP-MS | 134 |
| Table 4.10 | Molecular weight (Dalton) of proteins found in horns | 136 |
| Table 4.11 | Number of protein bands found in rhinoceros and buffalo horns | 137 |
| Table 4.12 | Restriction enzyme cutting partial fragment of cytochrome b gene of rhinoceros and buffalo | 144 |
| Table 4.13 | Primer developed for <i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i> , <i>Bos Taurus</i> and <i>Bubalus bubalis</i> DNA using Primer 3 software of cytochrome b region, | 146 |
| Table 4.14 | Ranking of different methods to be used for characterization of rhinoceros horn | 153 |
| Table 5.1 | Different method used and number of antler samples analyzed for different species | 165 |
| Table 5.2 | Quantitative measurements recorded for antlers | 165 |
| Table 5.3 | Mean standard deviation and coefficient of variance of first and second angles of antlers of five deer species | 176 |
| Table 5.4 | Variable used in the analysis | 177 |

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| Table 5.5 | Eigenvalues | 178 |
| Table 5.6 | Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients | 178 |
| Table 5.7 | Fisher's linear discriminant functions (Classification Function Coefficients) | 179 |
| Table 5.8 | Mean and range of relative intensity of peaks at various angles of five deer species | 185 |
| Table 5.9 | Concentrations of various elements (mean \pm SD) in ppm detected in antlers of different deer species by ICP-MS | 194 |
| Table 5.10 | Eigenvalues | 195 |
| Table 5.11 | Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients | 196 |
| Table 5.12 | Fisher's linear Discriminant Functions (Classification Function Coefficients) | 197 |
| Table 5.13 | Number of attempts undertaken through three different DNA extraction methods of sambar antler | 199 |
| Table 5.14 | Size and quantity of DNA yield from different regions antler by using sodium acetate method | 200 |
| Table 5.15 | Restriction enzyme cutting partial fragment of cytochrome b gene among deer species. | 207 |
| Table 5.16 | Restriction enzyme cutting partial fragment of 16S rRNA gene of deer species | 214 |
| Table 5.17 | Primer developed for deer species using Primer 3 software for cytochrome b region. | 216 |
| Table 5.18 | Primer developed for deer species using Primer 3 software for 16S rRNA region. | 216 |
| Table 5.19 | Ranking order of different techniques for identifying species from antlers of deer species based on the above study | 226 |

Summary

Characterization of bones, tusk, rhinoceros horn and antler to identify species are very important since there has been global concern to check the illegal trade to at least keep it to the sustainable level. India being one of the important biodiversity nation has yet greater task to protect their flora and fauna. Concern animals possessing these parts always have threat of poaching. The annual international trade in wildlife and its products has been estimated to be of approximately 20 billion USD, and the gravity of the illegal trade in wildlife alone can be judged by the economic value that is worth 5 billion USD, which in economic terms ranks second after the drugs. Stringent international and national laws to protect these natural resources even then sometime it becomes difficult to prove offences in the court of law due to non-availability of proper evidences. In such circumstances, characterization of the above mentioned animal parts are of utmost importance, as these have widely been reported in wildlife offences.

Species for this study were selected according to the endangered status of the species and since these products were difficult to identify mostly in processed form. Therefore, attempts were made to characterize bones of tiger (*Panthera tigris*) and leopard (*Panthera pardus*), ivory of Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*) have also been characterized and compared with African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) ivory, greater one horned rhinoceros (*rhinoceros unicornis*) horn and antlers of chital (*Axis axis*), sambar (*Cervus unicolor*), swamp deer (*Cervus duvauceli*). Other than these species, antlers of hog deer (*Axis porcinus*) and barking deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*) were also characterized.

The present study is an effort to develop methods to characterize these items for conservation of the concern species and objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Develop morphometric, chemical and DNA based techniques to characterize species from bones of major animals such as tiger, leopard, lion, chital, sambar, barking deer and swamp deer.

2. Establish species specific characteristics of raw and finished products of Asian ivory and prepare protocols to differentiate from other similar products, used in the trade.
3. Investigate source-area of Asian elephant ivory.
4. Determine characteristics of rhino horn.
5. Establish species characteristics and keys to identify antler of deer species.

Different techniques were used to characterize the above mentioned animal products so that even if it is transformed into powders, that can be identified using their characteristics. In this study, morphological features have been used to differentiate bones, tusk, horns and antlers. These biological materials have its unique characteristics. But, when they are found in processed form, loses their morphological features. Hence, some characteristics were needed to identify these materials in processed form. Many of analytical techniques were attempted to characterize processed biological materials. Use of combination of techniques increases the accuracy of identification and help in confirmation of the result. Scanning electron microscopy is one of the techniques used to study the surface morphology of any object. This technique was used to examine differences in the surface topography of biological materials. X-ray diffraction was used to know the crystalline structure of these wildlife products and to differentiate it from similar products. X-ray fluorescence an, instrumental technique was used to know the qualitative elemental composition. Further, the quantitative analysis was done using inductively coupled plasma – mass spectrometry. Thermo gravimetric technique was used to examine the nature of weight loss with constant increase in temperature. Protein profile was used only for rhinoceros horn. DNA analysis was performed for all these biological materials.

Chapter 1 is titled “Characterization of bone, rhino horn and antler for identifying species to deal offence cases: a need for conservation” contains an account of wildlife trade, need for characterization, species in study, objectives, hypothesis, methods used, analysis at different Institutions, usefulness of this study, organization of the thesis, limitation of this study and references.

Chapter 2 is titled “Characterization of tiger and leopard bones” contains brief information on illegal trade of tiger and leopard bones, details of literature review and methodology used for characterization of tiger and leopard bones, result, discussion and references. Through morphometry, major bones (skull, scapula, pelvic, femur and humerus) of tiger and leopards were successfully differentiated. Difference in surface topography at three areas viz. outer, cortex and core of tiger and leopard bones were examined using scanning electron microscopy. Core portion was most suitable to differentiate tiger and leopard bones. X-ray diffraction was used for powdered samples to know the differences in crystal structure but, however differences were not noticed. Thermo gravimetric analysis was successful in differentiating tiger and leopard bones. The rate of weight loss was found different at first peak in leopard (0.7%/min at 56 ° C) and tiger (1.2%/min at 58 ° C). The rate of weight loss at the second peak in tiger was twice (3.8%/min at 329 ° C) than the leopard (1.9%/min at 328 ° C). The water loss percentage was also different in tiger (approx 8%) and leopard (5%). Differences were also noticed in weight left at 1400 ° C in leopard (70.30%) and tiger (56.55%). This method could successfully differentiate powdered samples of bones.

X-ray fluorescence indicates that intensity of chlorine, sodium, aluminum and iron can be used to distinguish tiger and leopard bones. Elemental intensity concentration was determined using inductively coupled plasma – mass spectrometry. Discriminant function analysis revealed that a function comprising of calcium (Ca), copper (Cu) and sodium (Na) concentrations could classify both bones with 100% accuracy. DNA (300-400bp) was extracted from bones of tiger and leopard using Gene clean and Bio Robotic methods. Successful amplification of PCR product of DNA samples was achieved using primer cytochrome b and 16S rRNA genes. Further DNA sequencing was done. Alignment of tiger and leopard sequences revealed more than 20% polymorphism in cytochrome b region at 69 different sites out of 319bp and 6.35% polymorphism in 16S rRNA at 23 different sites out of 362 bp. Forty-two and 14 restriction enzymes at cytochrome b region were specific to tiger and leopard DNA respectively and 22 restriction enzymes were common and cut the DNA sequence at different positions. Thus, these restriction enzymes can be used to differentiate tiger

and leopard species. Using restriction enzymes which were cutting the 16S rRNA gene fragment at different sites in tiger and leopard, it was found that 7 restriction enzymes were specific to tiger DNA fragments where as 10 restriction enzymes to leopard DNA sequences and 20 restriction enzymes common to both tiger and leopard sequences cuts at variable positions. Further, universal primer for both tiger and leopard was developed using software Primer 3 of fragment length of 167-177 bp for cytochrome b and 258-285 bp for 16S rRNA gene to amplify smaller fragments which were extracted from bones. After amplification with these primers, sequencing can be accomplished to differentiate tiger and leopard bones.

Chapter 3 is titled "Characterization of ivory". This chapter deals with introduction of elephant species, illegal trade of ivory, literature review, methods of characterization of ivory, result, discussion and references. Morphological characteristic of ivory viz., Schreger angles are very useful in differentiating ivory obtained from different species. Mean Schreger angle value on the outer portion of ivory is more than 120° in African and less than 120° in Asian elephant. At dentine portion Asian elephant ivory has different surface topography than African elephant ivory. This difference can help in differentiating Asian and African elephant ivory pieces. X-ray diffraction (XRD) of ivory indicates hydroxyapatite mineral composition. Thus, these characteristic peaks can be used for identification purpose and the specificity of the diffraction pattern can distinguish the ivory. Ivory has characteristic three exothermic peaks for ivory. Average weight loss at 1400°C in case of African ivory is higher (48.15%) as compared to Asian ivory (47.15%). Average loss of moisture content in African ivory (3.45%) is less than Asian ivory (4.62%). Difference was observed in weight loss pattern after 1351° in African and Asian elephant ivory. The results show that strontium and hafnium was higher in concentration in African than in Asian elephant ivory. The concentration of strontium and hafnium could serve as species specific signatures to identify African and Asian ivory. Differences in concentration of various elements can be used in distinguishing African and Asian ivory. The consistence of yttrium concentration in all samples of Asian elephant ivory and not detectable in African elephant ivory can be useful to distinguish ivories of the two continents. This study shows that isotopic ratio from tusk powder and collagen is highly correlated. Isotopic study will be useful for

wildlife managers and law enforcement authorities to know the origin of seized material and take measures to curb poaching. It is very well possible to know the origin of tusk once all three isotopes carbon, nitrogen and strontium ratios are taken into account. The complete ranges of different techniques are useful to distinguish Asian and African ivory present in any forms.

Chapter 4 is titled “Characterization of rhinoceros horn (*rhinoceros unicornis*)”. This chapter deals with introduction of rhinoceros species, illegal trade of rhinoceros horn, literature review, methods of characterization of rhinoceros horn, result, discussion and references. Morphological characteristic of horn viz., presence of tubercles, grooves and bulge gives clue to identify rhinoceros horn. Discriminate function analysis of the quantitative measurements related to morphometry could differentiate rhinoceros horn and buffalo horn with 100% classification accuracy using two functions. Rhinoceros and buffalo horn had different densities 7.49 g/cm^3 and 4.54 g/cm^3 respectively. Mann-Whitney U test for densities were $p < 0.0001$ and asymptotic significance (2-tailed) were $p < 0.025$. The scan electron micrographs of rhinoceros horn showed numerous pores on the ventral side, each pore had several sub-pores of $9.39 \mu\text{m}$ (range = 5.56 to $10.11 \mu\text{m}$) diameter. This is a remarkable characteristic of rhinoceros horn and can be potentially used for its identification. The buffalo horn micrographs of dorsal surface does neither indicates presence of hairs nor pores on the ventral surface, instead there were presence of twisted fibers which had dark zone in the centre. X-ray diffraction (XRD) of rhinoceros horn indicates typical characteristic having minute peaks at 26° , 43° and 50° which were not noted in buffalo diffractogram. Background intensity of rhinoceros horn was higher as compared to buffalo horn. Two suspected cases of rhinoceros horn were analyzed using XRD and compared with the reference diffractogram and both the samples turned to be fakes. Thus, these characteristic peaks can be used for identification purpose and the specificity of the diffraction pattern can distinguish the rhinoceros horn efficiently from other horns. A characteristic exothermic peak in thermograph of rhinoceros horn in between 200 to 400°C would be useful in identification of rhinoceros horn products.

The qualitative elemental fluorescence obtained from rhinoceros horn reveal that out of the fourteen elements analyzed, the intensity (KCps) of iron (Fe) was highest where as intensity of magnesium (Mg) was lowest. ICP-MS analysis of Asian rhinoceros horn revealed that, calcium (Ca=67%) is the most abundant element, followed by Fe=12%, Na=10%, Mg=4%, K = 4%, Co=2% and Zn=1% with other elements in traces. Three elements viz. Mo, U and Cd were however not detected. However, mean concentration of four elements Ca, Na, V and Pb were different in wild and the zoo rhinoceros horns. The rhinoceros horns from zoo have higher concentrations of all four elements and the observed difference was almost thrice except calcium (Ca). The difference in calcium (Ca) and sodium (Na) concentrations are infer to be due to difference in feeding habits and high vanadium (V) and lead (Pb) concentrations reveals that the atmosphere of in wild is less polluted than zoo in metropolitan city. Protein profile analysis through sodium dodecyl sulphate – polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis reveals variation in number of protein bands and their positions in case of rhinoceros horn and buffalo horn. Based on the molecular weight calculated a dendrogram was generated using Ward's method to cluster rhinoceros horn and buffalo horn which clearly differentiate rhinoceros horns from buffalo horn based on presence of protein bands at different positions.

DNA was extracted from rhinoceros horns using Qiagen protocol and it yielded 150 to 600 bp of DNA and successfully amplified with cytochrome b (450 bp) and 16S rRNA (550 bp) genes of mt-DNA. Alignment of *Rhinoceros unicornis*, *Bos taurus* and *Bubalus bubalis* sequences revealed 24.65% polymorphism with 90 different sites out of 365bp of cytochrome b gene of mt-DNA. Five restriction enzymes are specific to *Rhinoceros unicornis* where as 15 restriction enzymes were specific to *Bos taurus* and 49 to *Bubalus bubalis*. None restriction enzyme were common to all three species at cytochrome b region. Thus, specific restriction enzymes for these three species can be used to differentiate them. Further, universal primer for all species was developed using software Primer 3 of fragment length of 210-250 bp for cytochrome b gene to amplify smaller fragments which were extracted from horns. After amplification with these primers, sequencing can be accomplished to differentiate these three species.

Chapter 5 is titled "Characterization of antlers" deals with the introduction to the antlers of different species, trade of antlers, literature review on antlers, methods for characterization, results, discussion and references. Antlers of different deer species can be differentiated based on their morphological features viz., branching patterns, numbers of tines, curvature, angles and roughness. Number of tines was specific to species and helpful in distinguishing antlers of different species. Antler of swamp deer had more than two tines, barking deer only one tine where as others chital, sambar and hog deer had two tines each. Only second tine of hog deer points downward and other tines of all the other four deer species and first tine of hog deer points upward. The above feature of hog deer antler can be diagnostic for its antler and can differentiate it from antlers of chital and sambar. Among chital and sambar antlers, the dichotomy of second tine of chital antler occurs at different portion of main beam and this feature can be used to differentiate antlers of chital and sambar. The number of angles depends on the presence of number of tines. The first angle indicate that swamp deer antler has widest mean angle measurement (109.25 ± 1.87), followed by chital (103.17 ± 1.66), sambar (65.59 ± 1.87), whereas hog deer and barking deer antlers had overlapping mean angle measurements. The barking deer antler does not have second tines and angle. Second mean angle measurements were observed to be widest in swamp deer antler (106.20 ± 2.97) followed by hog deer (85.26 ± 2.18), sambar (58.12 ± 3.11) and chital (54.35 ± 2.06). The branching pattern can substantiate wherever there is overlaps in the angle measurements. Data indicates that first angles can be used to differentiate antlers of various species. High overlap in the second angle measurements was noted in chital, sambar and hog deer except for swamp deer. Thus, this alone cannot be used to differentiate antler of different species, but corroborating with morphological features may allow distinguishing species. The angle measurements of first versus second angles were plotted, however few overlaps were noticed. These might be due to the age effect. These overlaps can be corrected by using physical parameters like branching patterns and number of tines etc. Discriminant Function analysis of the quantitative variables of morphometric measurements was also useful in differentiating antler of different species. Three functions derived using ten variables could absolutely differentiate the antlers of various species using Discriminant Function Analysis (DFA). First function could itself explain 57.3% variability. Canonical Discriminant function could cluster antler of different species with few overlaps due to antlers of various age groups. In such

cases other analytical techniques can be used for inter-specific distinction of antlers. Differentiation in cross-sections of antler of various species can be used for identification.

Scanning electron microscopy (SEM) can also be used successfully to differentiate species from antler and the surface topography of core portion gave best distinction. All antler samples matched with hydroxyapatite minerals (American Standard Test Matching file no. 9, card no. – 432). Since ivory is also hydroxyapatite it was compared with antlers and a minute but distinct difference was noticed. Diffractogram of antler showed hump after 50° whereas in ivory a slanting line was observed at this position. Crystallite size of ivory ranged between ~ 16.9 and 86.1 nm where as antler ranged between ~ 26.5 and 169.8 nm. Cell parameter 'a', 'c' and cell volume in case of antler (11.70, 6.92 and 820.22) was higher than ivory (9.49, 6.87 and 535.80), cell parameter $b = a$ thus, not measured separately. There were minute differences in the diffractogram of antlers of different deer species but, were not consistent. Dendrogram generated based on the presence and absence of diffraction peaks could cluster separately the antlers of different species.

Thermo gravimetric analysis indicates maximum losses were noticed in antlers of all species between 200 and 400°C . Weight loss pattern of antlers of different species showed remarkable differences in three temperature sections, $0-300^{\circ}\text{C}$, $450-700^{\circ}\text{C}$ and $1000-1400^{\circ}\text{C}$. Weight loss in sambar antler was very distinct from other species in all three temperature sections. Data analysis of antlers indicates variation in percent water loss at 100°C and the percent water loss pattern was highest in chital (7.5%) and lowest in antler of swamp deer (2.5%). Total percent weight left after burning till 1400°C was highest in antlers of hog deer (58%) and lowest in barking deer (43.1%). Endothermic peak at $770-810^{\circ}\text{C}$ was only noticed in antler of chital. The antler of sambar had three consecutive exothermic peaks at 884°C , 1120°C and 1339°C . The antler of swamp deer had two peaks between 800°C and 1135°C . Thermograph of hog deer and barking deer were quite similar except a minute exothermic peak at 150°C in barking deer. These minute distinct differences can be successfully used as species specific signature.

The qualitative elemental fluorescence X-ray scan obtained from antlers of five species reveal that the intensity (KCps) of calcium, phosphorous, sulphur, chlorine, aluminum, zinc, potassium, chromium, manganese, and gadolinium were variable among the deer species and the intensities of magnesium, copper, nickel, and osmium had very slight differences. Intensity of strontium was different in antlers of hog deer, sambar and chital and was absent in antler of barking deer and swamp deer. Chital antler can be distinguished in having highest intensity of sulphur. Sambar antler had high silicon and zinc intensities and low iron intensity. Swamp deer antler had high chromium intensity. Barking deer had high potassium intensities. Inductively coupled plasma – mass spectrometry was used to know the quantitative elemental intensities in the antlers of different species. Two elements cadmium (Cd) and uranium (U) were not detected in antlers. Discriminant function analysis of the mean concentrations of elements could classify different antlers with 100% accuracy using four functions comprising of zinc (Zn), iron (Fe), calcium (Ca), potassium (K), magnesium (Mg), lead (Pb), sodium (Na), vanadium (V), nickel (Ni), copper (Cu), cobalt (Co), chromium (Cr), barium (Ba), strontium (Sr) and molybdenum (Mo). In respect of the reference levels of 5 ppm barium (Ba) and 52 ppm strontium (Sr) in bone matrix (Anon. 1980; Pais and Benton 1997), the mean levels of Ba could be regarded as 'elevated' in different species viz. chital (33.03 ppm), sambar (128.57 ppm), swamp deer (207.55 ppm), hog deer (55.42 ppm) and barking deer (143.86 ppm). Strontium level was also found to be elevated in antler of all species e.g. chital (90.18 ppm), sambar (64.79 ppm), swamp deer (71.79 ppm), hog deer (66.34 ppm), and barking deer (289.71 ppm) compared to the reference. Analysis of plants and soil will be needed to check the level of barium and strontium in the surrounding.

In present study, success was achieved in extraction of DNA from outer and core region of antlers. It is possible to extract DNA from other regions too but this needs standardization. PCR was successful with cytochrome b (186 bp) but, better amplification may be possible with more standardization. Alignment of *Axis axis*, *Cervus unicolor* and *Cervus duvauceli* sequences revealed that 89 different sites were observed out of 311 bp with 28.62% polymorphism in cytochrome b gene where as alignment of these three species DNA sequences revealed that 26 different sites were

observed out of 532 bp with 4.89% polymorphism in 16S rRNA gene. Eight restriction enzymes were specific to *Axis axis* fragment where as 5 restriction enzymes were specific to *Cervus unicolor* and 30 to *Cervus duvauceli*. 9 restriction enzymes which were common to all the three species, but cuts at variable positions at cytochrome b region. Seventeen restriction enzymes are specific to *Axis axis*, with no restriction enzymes specific to *Cervus unicolor* and only one restriction enzyme is specific to *Cervus duvauceli*. 21 restriction enzymes are common to all three species but, cuts at variable positions at 16S rRNA region. Thus, these restriction enzymes can be used to differentiate these three species. Further, universal primer for all species was developed using software Primer 3 of fragment length of 249-250 bp for cytochrome b gene and 234-249bp primer fragments for 16S rRNA. After amplification with these primers, sequencing can be accomplished to differentiate these three species.

Study has clearly revealed that the combination of different techniques can be used to differentiate species from different parts and products of tiger and leopard bones, ivory of different origins, Indian rhinoceros horn and antlers of different species.