

CATTLE UNDER COCONUTS

THE GRAZING HABITS OF INDIGENOUS CATTLE UNDER COCONUTS

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WHILE any pasture is naturally reduced by the amount the cattle consume, there is a far greater reduction due to the damage done by trampling and bedding, and the crushed areas of dead grass become focal points for soil erosion and obnoxious weed-growths, so ultimately resulting in the total degradation of the pasture. The pastures are also reduced by the fouling which results from the droppings of the animals.

It is probably generally known that cattle do not graze continuously, but their grazing routine does not appear yet to have been studied. The main object of such a study is to preserve the pastures from destruction and fouling by removing the cattle to the manure sheds during the hours when they are not normally consuming grass.

The idea was to find whether the animals have a fixed and regular routine of grazing and also to see whether this pattern varied with different seasons of the year and among the animals themselves.

Methods.—Five adult animals of varying ages were selected at random. The animals were tethered to palms during the observation but were removed from one palm to another at eight-hour intervals. They were given a continuous supply of water in buckets.

Twelve, twenty-four-hour continuous observations were taken *i.e.* one observation a month the first observation was made on the 9th of July, 1952, and the last on 9th June, 1953. The observations commenced at 6 a.m. on the 9th of each month and concluded at 6 a.m. on the 10th, for the period of one year. Each animal was watched and timed separately by stop-watch and the total time spent in grazing is shown below in hours.

Results.—It was found that while all animals behaved similarly there were significant differences in the intensity of grazing during the four sessions. The results (which have been examined statistically) in brief are as follows:—

Typical Grazing Pattern					Time (hours)	Grazing Time
6 a.m. to noon	...	...	...	...	6	2.9 hours
Noon to 6 p.m.	...	...	...	...	6	4.6 "
6 p.m. to midnight	...	...	...	...	6	1.8 "
Midnight to 6 a.m.	...	...	...	...	6	1.0 "
Total					24	10.3 hours

Figure 1 shows the typical pattern of grazing.

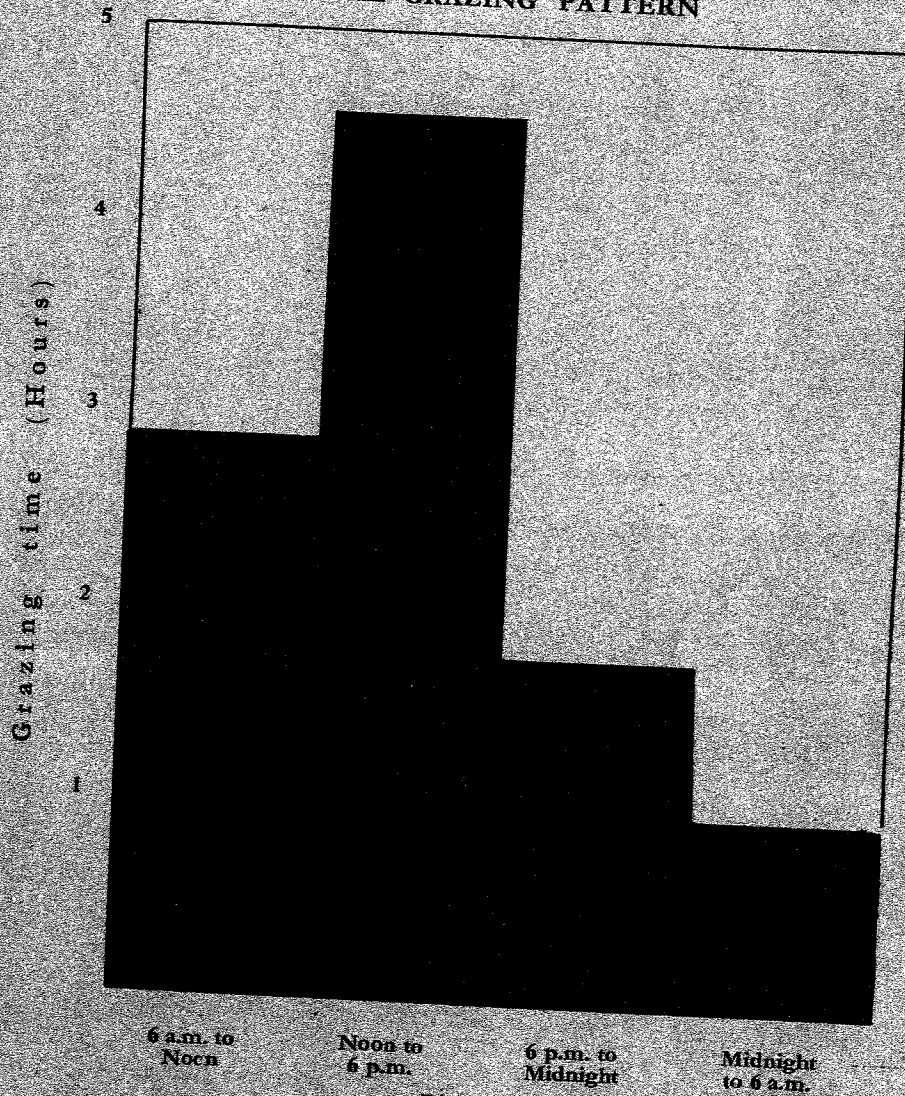


Young village cow grazing on Bandirippuwa Estate.

Thus during the course of a single day, the animals are grazing on an average only for a few hours. The rest of the time they are either lying down or chewing the cud.

The present studies have shown that the grazing habits of the indigenous low country (Sinhala) cattle kept under the shade of coconuts follow the same routine or pattern, i.e. the animals graze mostly during the hours of daylight from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. though by far the greatest intensity of grazing is during the hottest part of the day, from noon to 6 p.m. This holds good only when there is no heavy rain to disturb the animals during their grazing. Whenever it rains heavily, grazing is suspended and the animals take shelter. Thus if there is heavy rain during the afternoon session, the animals eat more during the late evening session. The animals are also encouraged to eat a little more during the dawn session in the months when there is a heavy dew, as this makes a harsh grass softer. In general, therefore the animals should be allowed to graze on the pastures during the hours of day light only and should be taken off the pastures at night. Only when there is heavy rain during the day should they be left out during the night.

TYPICAL GRAZING PATTERN



It is proposed to publish the results and the statistical analysis in a more technical article in due course but these are available for inspection if required.

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