

Records of Crab-eating Mongoose *Herpestes urva* in Manas National Park, Assam, India

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Abstract

Crab-eating Mongoose *Herpestes urva* was recorded (by direct sighting and camera-trapping) three times in Manas National Park, Assam, India, during 2007–2010, confirming its survival there during a long period of civil unrest.

Keywords: camera-trapping, civil unrest, habitat use

মানাহ বাষ্ট্ৰীয় উদ্যানত বৰনেউলৰ (*Herpestes urva*) অৱস্থিতি

সাৰাংশ :

মানাহ বাষ্ট্ৰীয় উদ্যানত বৰনেউলৰ (*Herpestes urva* (হাৰপেষ্টছ আৰ্ভা)) অৱস্থিতিৰ প্ৰমাণ ২০০৭ চনৰ পৰা ২০১০ চনলৈ তিনিবাৰকৈ পোৱা গৈছে (প্ৰত্যক্ষ দৰ্শন আৰু কেমেৰা ট্ৰেপ ব্যৱহাৰৰ দ্বাৰা)। বহু যাত-প্ৰতিযাতৰ মাজতো এই বিৰল প্ৰজাতিৰ নেউল মানাহ বাষ্ট্ৰীয় উদ্যানত আজিও দেখা পোৱা যায়। এই প্ৰজাতিৰ বৰনেউলৰ অৱস্থিতি সত্য প্ৰমাণিত হৈছে।

মূল শব্দ : কেমেৰা ট্ৰেপ, গণ বিশ্লেষণ, বাসস্থানৰ ব্যৱহাৰ

Crab-eating Mongoose *Herpestes urva* is known to use various habitats ranging from open deciduous forest to evergreen forest, from low to high altitudes. Little is known about the species's ecology, demographics and other natural history (Van Rompaey 2001). In India, it is restricted to the northeastern region (Datta *et al.* 2008) and is reportedly fairly common in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and northern West Bengal (Menon 2003). Datta *et al.* (2008) considered Crab-eating Mongoose to be abundant in Pakke Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh, comparing its camera-trap capture rates with those of other small carnivores. It is also among the more commonly recorded small carnivores in non-Sundaic Southeast Asia (Duckworth 1997, Than Zaw *et al.* 2008). By contrast, Choudhury (1997a, 1997b) considered that it is seen only rarely in the Indian part of its range.

In Manas National Park (= Manas NP), Assam, India, the long-lasting civil unrest has resulted in declines in various species (Hussain 1989, Rahmani *et al.* 1989). Manas NP faced losing its Greater One-horned Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis*, and has now only a very small population of Swamp Deer *Rucervus duvaucelii* (Das *et al.* 2009) and a declining population of Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* (pers. obs.). Although these ungulates are now being monitored and are reviving, the lesser-known forms are yet to draw conservationists' attention. So far there is only one published report of Crab-eating Mongoose in Manas NP, during a camera-trap survey for Tiger *Panthera tigris* (Das *et al.* 2007). This note presents three subsequent sightings of this mongoose in the park during 2007–2010, with locations according to the WGS84 datum.

On 25 October 2007 at 13h05, a Crab-eating Mongoose was sighted by JPD and photographed at Fulguri, just touching the Beki river at the end of the dried-up Jungrung stream

(26°44'05.6"N, 90°58'30.0"E; elevation 55 m). The animal was running fast towards the river-side and, on realising our presence at about 100 m distance, climbed a slope and disappeared in the undergrowth (Figs 1–2). The vegetation on both sides of the river bed was mixed deciduous forest with dense undergrowth.



Fig. 1. Crab-eating Mongoose *Herpestes urva*, 25 October 2007 at 13h05 in a dry river bed at Fulguri, Manas National Park, Assam, India (J. P. Das).



Fig. 2. Crab-eating Mongoose *Herpestes urva*, 25 October 2007, ascending the dry river-bank, looking at the observer before fleeing into the undergrowth (J. P. Das).



Fig. 3. Two Crab-eating Mongooses *Herpestes urva* camera-trapped on 29 March 2009 in Sorphuli, Manas National Park, Assam, India.

On 29 March 2009, two Crab-eating Mongooses were camera-trapped in the Sorphuli area near a small water-body (26°43'34.42"N, 91°02'54.98"E; elevation 55 m; Fig. 3). This habitat was a moist but drying water-body (10 m radius), shaded with dense mixed vegetation on all sides.

On 27 April 2010, three Crab-eating Mongooses were sighted (by AS) on the way to Kokilabari from Daimary (26°46'20.84"N, 91°01'33.16"E; elevation 100 m). The habitat was again a sandy and rocky dried-up river-bed, emerging from the thick dense semi-evergreen forest on the northern boundary of the park at the international border with Bhutan. On seeing us, the mongooses ran away.

Many small carnivores are not often seen and are hence little known. This species continues to survive in Manas NP despite a significant amount of habitat alteration (Sarma *et al.* 2008) including loss of water-bodies. Researchers tend not to show much interest in small carnivores (Choudhury 1997a, 1997b). Further research could identify if there are any management needs for the species in the national park.

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