

# Observations of Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica* and Siberian Weasel *M. sibirica* in Nepal

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## Abstract

Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica* and Siberian Weasel *M. sibirica* were observed at localities new for the species, Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA) and Mugu district, respectively. These add to the few specific locality records for each species in Nepal.

**Keywords:** altitude, central Himalaya, distribution, Data Deficient, Near Threatened, threats

पहाडी र साइबेरियाली मलसांप्रोको नेपालबाट नयाँ रेकर्ड

सारांश

एउटा पहाडी मलसांप्रो *Mustela altaica* र एउटा साइबेरियाली मलसांप्रो *M. sibirica* क्रमशः अन्नपूर्ण संरक्षण क्षेत्रको माथिल्लो मुस्तांग र मुगु जिल्लाको रारा तल नजिक देखिएका थिए। यस्ता सूचनाहरूले नेपालमा थोरै मात्र जानकारी भएका मलसांप्रोको प्रजातिहरूको भौगोलिक विस्तारको बारेमा महत्वपूर्ण जानकारी मिल्दछ। प्रस्तुत लेखमा यी दुवै मलसांप्रोको नयाँ ठाउँ विशेषबाट गरिएको रेकर्डबारे विवेचना गरिएको छ।

Five species of weasels *Mustela*, Stoat *M. erminea*, Siberian Weasel *M. sibirica*, Yellow-bellied Weasel *M. kathiah*, Mountain Weasel *M. altaica* and Stripe-backed Weasel *M. strigidorsa*, are reported to occur in Nepal (Baral & Shah 2008, Jnawali *et al.* 2011). However, the occurrence of Stripe-backed Weasel in Nepal was questioned by Abramov *et al.* (2008), whilst none of Mitchell (1975), IUCN (2012) or Thapa (in prep.) included Stoat as a member of the Nepal fauna. Even the other three species are known from relatively few authenticated localities in the country, and information about weasels from the entire Himalayan region is typically scarce. This note presents additional localities of Mountain and Siberian Weasels from the Nepal Himalaya.

A full-grown Mountain Weasel (Fig. 1) was observed on 17 August 2008 in mid-afternoon between Samar and Syangbochen in Mustang district (28°58'N, 83°48'E; altitude 3,800 m). The location lies within Annapurna Conservation Area, the largest protected area in central Nepal. The terrain was gently rolling, with much short shrubby vegetation amid rocky outcrops. The animal kept looking at the observers from behind the rocks, repeatedly darting in and out from the crevices and coming as close as 5 m. The day was sunny with a light breeze.

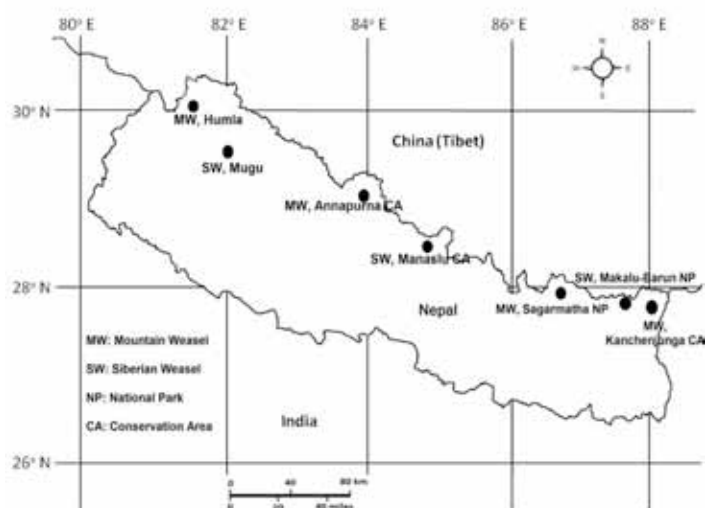
An adult Siberian Weasel (Fig. 2) was observed on 21 December 2012 at 12h00 near Pina Village Development Committee in Mugu district, north-west Nepal (about 29°32'N, 82°06'E; altitude somewhere within 2,700–3,000 m). The day



**Fig. 1.** Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica*, Annapurna Conservation Area, Nepal, 17 August 2008 (Photo: Anand Chaudhary).



**Fig. 2.** Siberian Weasel *Mustela sibirica*, Mugu district, Nepal, 21 December 2012 (Photo: Anil Prajapati).



**Fig. 3.** Records of Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica* and of Siberian Weasel *M. sibirica* in Nepal.

was sunny and the weasel came within 15 m of the observers, curiously peeping out from a fuel-wood pile outside a house about 100 m away from more natural habitat.

These two weasel species are recorded from only a few specific localities, including the present records, in Nepal. Therefore their national status is uncertain at present. Available records of both the species are shown on Fig. 3. Mountain Weasel has recently been recorded from Sagarmatha National Park and Kanchenjunga Conservation Area further east of Annapurna Conservation Area (Katuwal *et al.* 2013) and from Thadodhunga, Humla district (Ghimirey & Acharya in prep.) lying west from Annapurna Conservation Area. It was portrayed as occurring across the mountain region of Nepal by Jnawali *et al.* (2011), but no details were given of the sources for this, notably of the methods of detection and of verification, if any. This range should therefore be seen as hypothetical. It is categorised globally as Near Threatened on *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (IUCN 2012) while it is assessed as Data Deficient nationally (Jnawali *et al.* 2011). Potential threats in Nepal include depletion of prey base, habitat degradation and general disturbance through livestock and other anthropogenic activities (Jnawali *et al.* 2011).

Siberian Weasel has recently been recorded in Makalu-Barun National Park (Ghimirey & Acharya 2012) and Manaslu Conservation Area (Katuwal *et al.* 2013). It is considered

a Least Concern species both nationally and globally (Jnawali *et al.* 2011, IUCN 2012). However information is not available on its population size and potential threats in the country (Jnawali *et al.* 2011). Therefore, its national status category might warrant further revision: Data Deficient might be appropriate.

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