

# Behavioural notes on mongoose species from Central India

Kolipaka S. SHEKHAR

## Foraging and vigilance of Ruddy Mongooses

Two Ruddy Mongooses *Herpestes smithii* were spotted at a distance of about 50 m at 16h05 on 29 November 2007 in a dry, rocky, open patch of forest at Panna National Park, Madhya Pradesh (24°47'N, 80°08'E). They were very close to a troop of Hanuman Langurs *Semnopithecus entellus* that sat in the shadows of acacia trees. The mongooses were looking under rocks, around the trunks of trees and on the forest floor for things of interest. Their presence did not seem to bother the monkeys. One mongoose discovered a moth lying on a rock and chased the insect while it flew. It jumped into the air to reach the airborne insect and ran after it in quick bursts of speed, but the moth managed to raise itself out of reach of the mongoose. The two mongooses split up and foraged in different areas 15–25 feet apart, but did not let the distance between them grow. They communicated constantly with each other while searching the forest floor. One mongoose used its muzzle as a probe to inspect under rocks and its front feet to turn the rocks over for inspection. This search disturbed a cricket which jumped into the air. The mongoose quickly ran after it, keeping its tail above the ground. It caught the insect with its mouth as it landed on the ground, with the aid of its forefeet it bit the cricket quickly and swallowed it. It then immediately moved towards the second mongoose, looking for other potential prey. At about 16h35 the langurs uttered a single warning call, a low note which sounded more like a spit. Both mongooses assumed an attentive position on their hind feet, scanning the areas for potential danger. A Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* trotted into the area and the mongooses immediately fled into an area of thick vegetation and rocks.

## Meeting of Grey Mongoose and Golden Jackal

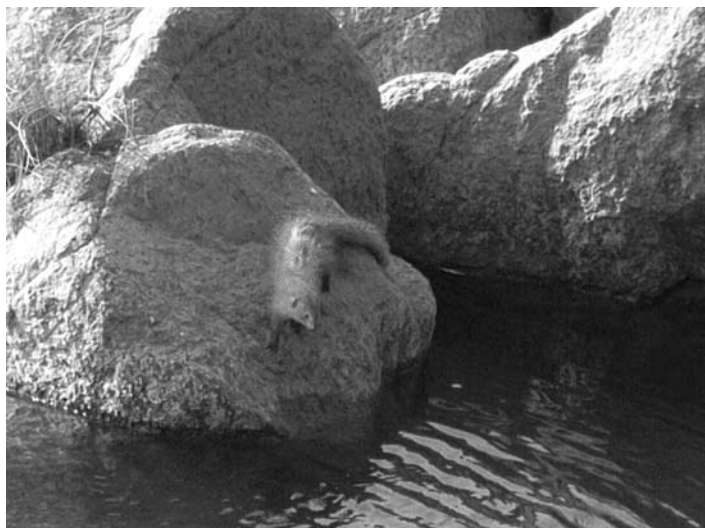
While walking through a thickly vegetated forest path in Panna National Park on 12 August 2007 at 15h00 I heard a rustle in the vegetation. A Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* emerged and stood by a termite mound about 15 m from me. It looked around, into the canopy, and steadily explored the mound using its long muzzle

and front paws. Another small rustle then startled both the jackal and me. The jackal froze and kept looking towards the sound. An adult Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii* walked out of the vegetation and appeared exactly in front of, and three feet from, the jackal. Neither jackal nor mongoose seemed surprised by the other's presence. The mongoose inched towards a fallen tree, climbed up a branch to the jackal's eye level. The jackal slowly moved to within a foot of the mongoose. Each sniffed the other's muzzle, without physical contact. The mongoose then descended and disappeared into the vegetation, followed after a few seconds by the jackal. Neither animal appeared in any way defensive towards the other.

## Excellent swimming ability of Grey Mongoose

Bare rock islands form in the Ken River (Panna district, Madhya Pradesh; 24°44'N, 80°00'E) when water recedes after the monsoon. Mongoose tracks have been noted in the soft sands around the islands. Mongooses are known to eat river invertebrates like crabs and snails and were also seen feeding on the abundant dung beetles (Scarabaeidae). On 12 October 2007 at 15h50 a Grey Mongoose was sighted, foraging among rocks of a small island. The mongoose then checked around the rocks for a place to exit. It then dived into the water and, to our surprise, swam nearly 200 m to the shore. The mongoose moved swiftly and swam along the current. It kept its head high above the water throughout the swim and its tail moved in synchrony with its body. At the shore it moved towards cover instantly and while in motion wriggled its body a couple of times, apparently an attempt to shed water from its soaked body.

**Principal Investigator, Small Wildcat Project, Society for Nature Conservation and Education (SNCAE – India), Flat No 10, Bhavana Enclave, Rajendra Nagar 2nd Street, Visakhapatnam 530016, Andhra Pradesh, India  
Email: shekhar\_k\_s@yahoo.com, sncae\_india@yahoo.com**



Grey Mongoose swimming in Ken River, Central India (Photos courtesy: Karan Rana).