

Recent sightings of Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* in Eserna hill range, Jalore, Rajasthan, India: northwest extension of its known range

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Abstract

Three photo-documented sightings of Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* in the Eserna hill range, in the western part of the Aravalli hills, Rajasthan, India, constitute a north-westward extension of its known range from the nearest known population, in Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan, which lies roughly 100 km to the east.

Keywords: Aravalli hills, direct sighting, habitat use, thorn forest

Introduction

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* is known from peninsular India, in the Western and Eastern Ghats, extending northwards up to Delhi, in the west up to at least 27°30'N in Rajasthan, and in the east to 24°N in Bihar; outside India it occurs only in Sri Lanka (Pocock 1939, Prater 1971, Corbet & Hill 1992, Hussain 1999, Menon 2003). It is listed in Schedule II of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and on Appendix III of CITES, and is classified as Least Concern in *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*, where its population trend is assessed as declining (Choudhury *et al.* 2008). Nationally also, it was evaluated as Least Concern during a Conservation Assessment and Management Plan workshop (Molur *et al.* 1999). This paper reports the finding of Ruddy Mongoose north-west of its known range in Rajasthan, India.

Records

Ruddy Mongoose was sighted three times in the Eserna hill range, near the village of Meda in Jalore district (Table 1). Sightings, from three closely-spaced localities, included an adult eating fresh goat skin near a temple, and three young animals repeatedly emerging from rock holes; only for one sighting was photography possible. The distinctive tail, with a 2–3-inch black tip (Fig. 1), allowed confirmation of identification as Ruddy Mongoose. The area lies in biogeographic zone 3A (Rodgers *et al.* 2000) and the vegetation type has been classified as Northern Tropical Thorn Forest (6B) and sub-type Desert Thorn Forest (6B/C1) (Champion & Seth 1968). The Eserna hill range is about 8–10 km long with its highest peak about 500 m asl. The complete hill range has good-quality thorn forest (Figs 2–3), protected by generations-old religious belief with a temple of goddess *Amba mata* in its centre. Sheep and goat are annually sacrificed by the locals, although such practices are illegal in India. The area is a multiple-use area defined by the Rajasthan



Fig. 1. Adult Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* in thorn forest in Eserna Range, Rajasthan, India, 3 January 2010. Note black tip to tail (two views).

Table 1. Sightings of Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* in Eserna Range, Jalore, Rajasthan, India.

Location ¹	Date	Animals seen	Altitude ¹	Habitat
Meda Uparla, near <i>Mata ji ka Than</i> , 25°15'34.80"N, 72°42'26.77"E	3 Jan 2010	2 adult, 3 young	460	Mixed thorn forest
Meda valley, near <i>Mamaji ka Than</i> , 25°15'38.17"N, 72°42'17.11"E	21 Sep 2010	2 adult, 1 young	372	Mixed thorn forest
Towards Dhawala village side, 25°16'25.20"N, 72°42'26.13"E	14 Feb 2013	2 adult	275	Dry nalah ² , amid thorn forest

¹Geographical coordinates (WGS84) and approximate altitude, in m asl, were measured using a hand-held GPS receiver (Garmin MAP62S).

²A nalah is a local name for a dry rivulet. In desert areas, they hold water only briefly, remaining dry almost round the year. Their vegetation is distinct from the surrounding areas.



Fig. 2. The Eserna range, Rajasthan, India, during the monsoon season. This hill range receives relatively high rainfall for the region.



Fig. 3. A complete view of the Eserna range, Rajasthan, India, from where the new population of Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* is reported.

state forest department as reserved forest, but now facing severe pressure from the surrounding villages and from mining activities.

Discussion

Ruddy Mongoose inhabits forests, taking 'forest' as classified by Champion & Seth (1968), including rather open, low-stature formations such as thorn forests. It is considered to occur less in areas near human disturbance (Hussain 1999) than do the related Indian Grey Mongoose *H. edwardsii* and Small Indian Mongoose *H. auro punctatus*. The Thar Desert of Rajasthan extends west from the Aravalli hill range. The range has higher rainfall than the adjacent desert: mean annual rainfall for the district is around 270–280 mm, whereas locations holding Ruddy Mongoose receive 380–400 mm. There are as yet no records of Ruddy Mongoose from the Thar desert itself. Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan and Taranga Hills in Gujarat are the locations closest to the present sightings, which is about 100 km further west of them (Fig. 4). Other recent records from north and central India are from Madhav National Park, Madhya Pradesh (Choudhury *et al.* 2008); Asola Wildlife Sanctuary,



Fig. 4. Recent sighting localities of Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii* in Rajasthan, India.

Delhi (Hussain 1999); Panna National Park (Shekhar 2008); Sariska Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan (Gupta 2011); Taranga Hills in northern Gujarat (Patel & Patel 2010, 2011) and a few protected areas in the south and central Aravalli range in Rajasthan, i.e. Sajjangarh Sanctuary (Bhatnagar *et al.* 2009), Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary (Sharma 2001), Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Phulwari-Ki-Nal Wildlife Sanctuary of Rajasthan (Anon. 2010). The Eserna hill range harbours many other threatened species (Dookia 2012), and warrant conservation.

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