

A sighting of Stripe-backed Weasel *Mustela strigidorsa* at Doi Lang, Thailand

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Abstract

On 3 March 2011 a single Stripe-backed Weasel *Mustela strigidorsa* was seen in Doi Lang, contiguous with Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park, site of one of the few previous Thai records of the species. In 2009, a credible report was received of one on the summit of Thailand's highest mountain, Doi Inthanon.

Keywords: altitude, daytime activity, Doi Inthanon, location records

รายงานการพบเห็นเพียงพอนเส้นหลังขาว *Mustela strigidorsa* ที่ดอยกลาง, ประเทศไทย

บทคัดย่อ

เมื่อวันที่ 3 มีนาคม พ.ศ. 2554 มีรายงาน เพียงพอนเส้นหลังขาวถูกพบเห็นในพื้นที่ดอยกลาง ซึ่งเป็นพื้นที่เชื่อมต่อกับอุทยานแห่งชาติดอยฟ้าห่มปก และเป็นหนึ่งในพื้นที่ไม่กี่แห่งที่มีการพบเห็นสัตว์ชนิดนี้ในประเทศไทย นอกจากนั้นในปี พ.ศ. 2552 ยังมีรายงานที่น่าเชื่อถือ ได้ว่ามีการพบเห็น เพียงพอนเส้นหลังขาว บนยอดสูงสุดของดอยอินทนนท์ ซึ่งเป็นภูเขาที่สูงที่สุดในประเทศไทย

คำสำคัญ: สถานที่ถูกบันทึก, ระดับความสูง, กิจกรรมตอนกลางวัน, ดอยอินทนนท์

The Stripe-backed Weasel *Mustela strigidorsa* of Southeast Asia and adjoining areas has generally been seen as a rare and presumably threatened species, but a recent collation of records across its range suggested that it was, instead, much overlooked by standard wildlife survey techniques and much more common than generally assumed (Abramov *et al.* 2008). While Abramov *et al.* (2008) traced a fair number of records from Lao PDR and Myanmar (and Streicher *et al.* [2010] added several more from the former country), they found records from only five sites in Thailand. Given the generally higher levels of wildlife research, survey, and leisure watching in Thailand than in Lao PDR and Myanmar, this suggests the possibility that the species may be genuinely scarce in Thailand, indicating that further records from the country warrant publication.

On 3 March 2011, at about 08h00, whilst leading a bird tour group, a single weasel was observed crossing the road at Doi Lang in far northern Thailand at 20°06'00"N, 99°17'00.61"E (co-ordinates from Google Earth). The location was at an altitude, very roughly, of 1,900 m, in primary montane broad-leaf evergreen forest. Doi Lang, adjoining the border of Myanmar (Burma), is contiguous with Doi Pha Hom Pok National Park.

The observation lasted too few seconds for the use of binoculars. The weasel was about 4 metres from our group when it crossed the road. Small passerine birds were agitated by its presence. The weasel was less than 30 cm in length, with a bushy tail. It appeared almost entirely dark chocolate blackish brown including the visible parts of the belly. The pale buffy golden yellow was restricted from lower chin to fore-neck with the contrasting dark colouration extending beyond below the ear. There was no contrasting colour at the tail tip or any black face mask. It was not possible to assess the presence of any pale stripe on the back, given the angle as the weasel crossed the road, side-on to the observers.

In sum, it appeared a perfect match for the illustration of Stripe-backed Weasel in Francis (2008).

Given the features observed, the only possible confusion species is Yellow-bellied Weasel *M. kathiah*, which at the angle of viewing would have shown clearly the continuation of the fore-neck colour back along the venter. Siberian Weasel *M. sibirica* is a highly variable species but seems never to have the contrasting foreneck-hindneck-and-dorsum coloration observed here. The author has been fortunate enough to see Siberian Weasel twice in Wolong Nature Reserve in Sichuan, China.

This is the first weasel the author has encountered in northwest Thailand in five field trips. In March 2009 a group of birders reported to him a sighting of Stripe-backed Weasel at Doi Inthanon (Thailand's highest mountain, rising to 2,565 m; roughly, 18°33'N, 98°34'E), apparently running across the edge of the car park at the summit. The exact details are unknown, but they did observe the stripe on the back.

Among the few Thai sites with records traced by Abramov *et al.* (2008) is Doi Pha Hom Pok NP, adjacent to Doi Lang. None of the previous records is from near Doi Inthanon.

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