

Field observations of Yellow-throated Martens *Martes flavigula* feeding on flowers in Meghalaya, North-east India

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The Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* is a wide-ranging carnivore distributed from Pakistan and Afghanistan in the west to the Russian Far East and Indonesia in the east (Corbett & Hill 1992). In India, the species is reported to occur in the foothills of the Himalaya across Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and east into Sikkim (Hussain 1999), Assam (Choudhury 1997a), Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 1997b), West Bengal (Choudhury 1999), Nagaland (Choudhury 2000), and Manipur (Ramakantha 1994). In Meghalaya, it is reported to occur in the Garo hills as well as in Balpakram National Park (Kumar *et al.* 2002). Little is known of the ecology of the species, a trend that is true for most non-Holarctic species of carnivores (e.g. Grassman *et al.* 2005).

This short note is based on observations made during a visit to Balpakram National Park, Meghalaya. The park (220 km²; Khan *et al.* 1997) is located in the south Garo Hills district and the elevation ranges from 200 m to 1,027 m. The habitat comprises of tropical moist deciduous and tropical evergreen forests (Haridasan & Rao 1985). On 11 March 2007, we were walking along a trail close to Mahadeo *aking* (village) Inspection Bungalow at Balpakram, when we saw two Yellow-throated Martens on a *Cynometra polyandra* (Roxb.) tree at 06h20. The tree was approximately 20 m off the road on a declivity and was in full bloom. The two animals seemed to be feeding on the flowers, and moved along branches between a height of 8 and 15 m. The martens foraged for about 10 minutes till the presence of passers-by on the trail caused them to look up and move down the tree into the undergrowth.

We walked further along and as we were approximately 100 m further down the trail we again saw two Yellow-throated Martens running after each other on the ground through an Areca-nut *Areca catechu* plantation. The martens stopped for a while and sat on a broken tree stump at the edge of the Areca-nut plantation, and after a few minutes climbed another tree of the same species, *C. polyandra*, also in full bloom. The two martens foraged on the tree, walking around in both the lower and upper reaches of the canopy and feeding on flowers. The martens stayed on this tree for approximately 10 minutes, till a strong gust of wind and a light rain caused the tree to sway. The martens ran down and we did not see them after this. The surrounding habitat was an Areca-nut plantation interspersed with few remnant native forest trees, and the area nearby had been cleared for *jhum* (shifting cultivation). Both the trees were mid-storey trees approximately 17–20 m high.

Yellow-throated Martens are known to be dietary generalists similar to other martens (Ramakantha 1994, Ruggiero *et al.* 1994, Ewer 1998, Parr & Duckworth 2007). They are known to eat rodents, small mammals, birds, reptiles, fruits and honey (Ramakantha 1994), and Pocock (1941) reported “a fondness for” the nectar of flowers. Martens are known to take advantage of seasonal variation and locally available resources (Ewer 1998). A similar plasticity has also been observed with another omnivorous carnivore in tropical forests, the Brown Palm Civet *Paradoxurus jerdoni* (Mudappa 2001). During our observations, we noted that the martens visited two flowering trees of the same

species consecutively. The tree species was very distinctive due to its profuse flowering, and we noted that the two trees visited were the closer together of three visible flowering *C. polyandra* trees on the slope. We suggest from our observation that the martens intentionally capitalised on this opportunity to forage on this species. However, further studies on resource tracking based on availability and use of resources need to be conducted before conclusions can be made.

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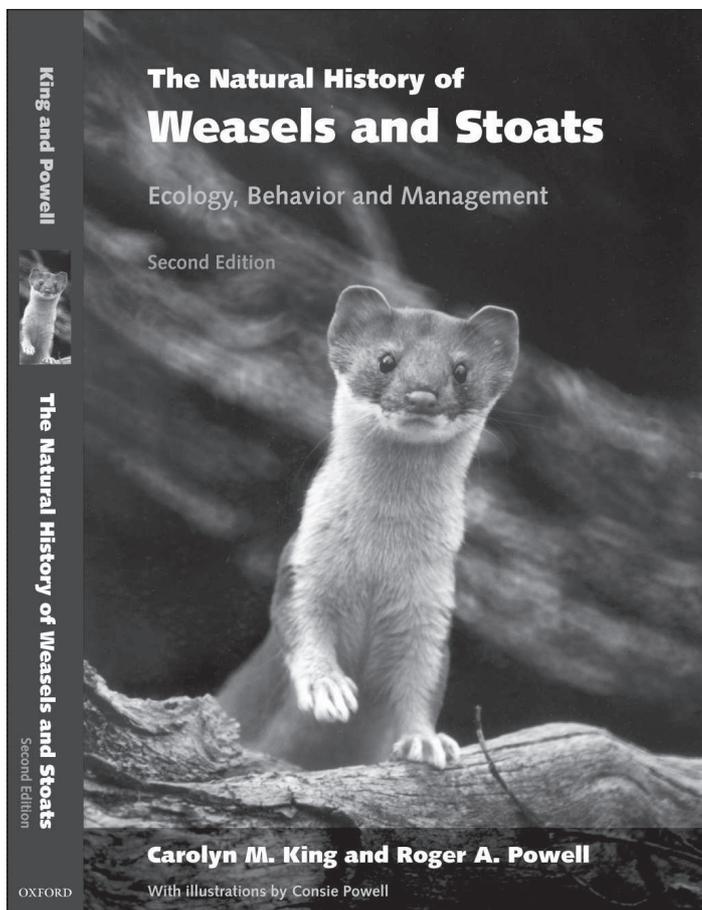
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