A market record of Owston’s Civet *Chrotogale owstoni* from Lao PDR, west of the known range

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Abstract

An Owston’s Civet *Chrotogale owstoni* photographed for sale at a roadside wildlife meat stall in Vientiane province, Lao PDR, at 18°44′09″N, 102°58′03″E in 2009 suggests occurrence west of the known world range. Historical Lao records come from only one locality; recently animals have been seen captive at one site in the country and camera-trapped in three others.

Keywords: Distribution, locality record, range extension, wildlife meat trade

On 1 May 2009, an Owston’s Civet *Chrotogale owstoni* was photographed at a roadside stall selling wildlife products to passers-by by David Green (Project Implementation Department Manager, Phu Bia Mining Limited), during routine work travel (Fig. 1). The stall was near Ban Muanglong, Vientiane province (18°44′09″N, 102°58′03″E). Also visible in the photograph is a chevrotain *Tragulus* and a large, long-tailed, rat. The Owston’s Civet was freshly killed, apparently by gunshot. The road runs through rural northern Lao PDR and presently carries many vehicles per day, mostly between the Phu Bia Mining area and route 13 south from Vientiane. No discussion was held with the trader on the origin of the animal, but it is unlikely that it had been brought any significant distance by road for sale at this stall. Such stalls are common beside main roads in Lao PDR, and there is therefore no reason to transport relatively low-value animals long distances. Although no price for this animal was recorded, that it was hanging openly for sale indicates that it was seen as of no special value. High-value species (which would be worth transporting long distances to likely sales points) are rarely on open display nowadays. However, it cannot be ruled out that it had come, through some chance factor, from a longer distance than expected. The locality should not be considered to hold Owston’s Civet, pending further records.

The sale point lies in an extensive landscape of forested hills (ranging from 300 m to over 2,000 m altitude), subject to widespread, heavy, shifting cultivation for many decades at least. Little old-growth forest survives. It is effectively unsurveyed for wildlife. Until recently remote, roads are being newly cut and upgraded from tracks widely in this region, in connexion with various large activities such as hydroelectric power development and mining. The site of sale lies only 24 km north of the boundary of the 1,390 km² Phou Khaokhoay National Protected Area (NPA), a forested massif so far only superficially surveyed for mammals, despite its proximity to Vientiane (Evans et al. 2000).

Owston’s Civet occurs only in Lao PDR, Vietnam, and adjacent parts of China, and was identified as a high conservation priority in the 1989 IUCN/SSC Action Plan for Mustelids and Viverrids (Schreiber et al. 1989). It is internationally red-listed as Globally Threatened – Vulnerable (IUCN 2009). There are few records from Lao PDR (Fig. 2). The only historical information is from (Ban) Xiangkhouang (19°20′N, 103°22′E), where one was collected and a locally prepared pelt was procured between 15 December 1925 and 13 January 1926 (Thomas 1927). In the 1990s many captives were held in Ban Lak-20 (= Ban Lak Xao; 18°11′N 104°58′E) (Duckworth et al. 1999, King 2002a, 2002b). In the 2000s there were camera-trap records from Nakai–Nam Theun NPA (many; Johnson & Johnston 2007) and Nam Et–Phou Louey NPA (one; Johnson et al. 2009). All these areas support evergreen forest with a relatively benign dry season. It is likely that areas with similar climate and pre-clearance forest type occur around the Ban Muanglong sale point.

A recent camera-trap record (IEWMP 2010) from January 2010 in the Phou Chomvoy Provincial Protected Area, Bolikhamsxai province, is the first confirmed record of the species from that pro-

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Protected Area is important, because the area is heavily hunted (Evans et al. 2000). The habitat use of the species and its tolerance of encroachment and hunting are too poorly understood to predict responsibly its status in this part of Lao PDR.

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References


Western record of Owston’s Civet


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