

# 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

**ບັນຊີການພົບເຫັນຕາມທ້ອງຕະຫຼາດ ຂອງເຫັງນລາຍເສືອໂຄ່ງອິນດູຈີນ (*Owston's Civet Chrotogale owstoni*) ໃນ ສປປ ລາວ, ໃນນອກເຂດທາງເບື້ອງຕາເວັນຕົກຂອງຖິ່ນອາໄສເຊິ່ງເປັນທີ່ຮູ້ຈັກ**

## ບົດຂັດຫຍໍ້

ເຫັງນລາຍເສືອໂຄ່ງອິນດູຈີນ *Chrotogale owstoni* ໄດ້ຖືກພົບເຫັນ ແລະ ບັນທຶກພາບ ໃນປີ 2009 ທີ່ຮ້ານຂາຍຂົນສັດປ່າ ແຫ່ງໜຶ່ງລຽບແຄມທາງ (18°44'09"N, 102°58'03"E) ໃນແຂວງວຽງຈັນ ສປປ ລາວ. ການພົບເຫັນຄັ້ງນີ້ສະແດງໃຫ້ເຫັນເຖິງວ່າ ສັດຊະນິດນີ້ມີຢູ່ໃນນອກເຂດທາງເບື້ອງຕາເວັນຕົກ ຂອງຖິ່ນອາໄສເຊິ່ງເປັນທີ່ຮູ້ຈັກ. ບັນຊີເກົ່າຂອງການພົບເຫັນສັດຊະນິດນີ້ແມ່ນໄດ້ມາຈາກພຽງແຕ່ທ້ອງຖິ່ນດຽວ. ໃນເມື່ອບໍ່ດົນມານີ້, ເຫັງນຊະນິດນີ້ໄດ້ຖືກພົບເຫັນກັກຂັງເປັນສັດລ້ຽງ ໃນພື້ນທີ່ແຫ່ງໜຶ່ງ ແລະຖືກບັນທຶກພາບໄດ້ໃນອີກ 3 ແຫ່ງອື່ນໆພາຍໃນປະເທດ.

**ຄຳສັບຫຼັກ:** ການກະຈາຍ, ເຂດຂະຫຍາຍຂອງຖິ່ນອາໄສທີ່ເປັນທີ່ຮູ້ຈັກ, ບັນຊີພົບເຫັນຂົນສັດປ່າ, ການຄ້າຂາຍຂົນສັດປ່າ

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 up-graded 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 km<sup>2</sup> 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, Bolikhamxai province, is the first confirmed record of the species from that pro-



Fig. 1. Freshly killed *Owston's Civet* *Chrotogale owstoni* for sale at a roadside stall, Ban Muanglong, Lao PDR, 1 May 2009 (Photo: David Green / Phou Bia Mining Limited).

tected area, which also lacks a harsh dry season. The photograph was taken at 18°29'20"N, 105°05'12"E at an altitude of approximately 1,100 m a.s.l. on the northern border of the protected area. The point is around 1.3 km from a heavily degraded road that is accessible by hand-tractor but not pick-up; it is around 7.5 km from the nearest village and around 2.5 km from the Vietnam border.

Overall, the species's distribution and status in Lao PDR remains poorly understood, because methods suitable to locate it, spotlighting and camera-trapping, have been used to sufficient intensity in few places in the northern highlands or in the Annamites, the mountains forming much of the boundary between Lao PDR and Vietnam. Extensive spotlighting in the southern two-thirds of the country in the 1990s failed to locate it (Duckworth 1997), suggesting that it is not common in, and may be absent from, the Mekong lowlands and adjacent foothills, where the dry season is generally harsher than in the Annamites and northern highlands.

Because of the species's perilous global conservation status, investigation as to whether it does occur around the Ban Muanglong sale point is urgently needed. Assuming that it does so, surveys are warranted to understand its status in the generally rugged landscape not under protected area designation from Phou Khaokhoay NPA north to Nam Et–Phou Louey NPA and southeast to Nakai–Nam Theun NPA, given the number of large landscape-scale projects planned or underway. Even clarification of whether *Owston's Civet* occurs in Phou Khaokhoay National

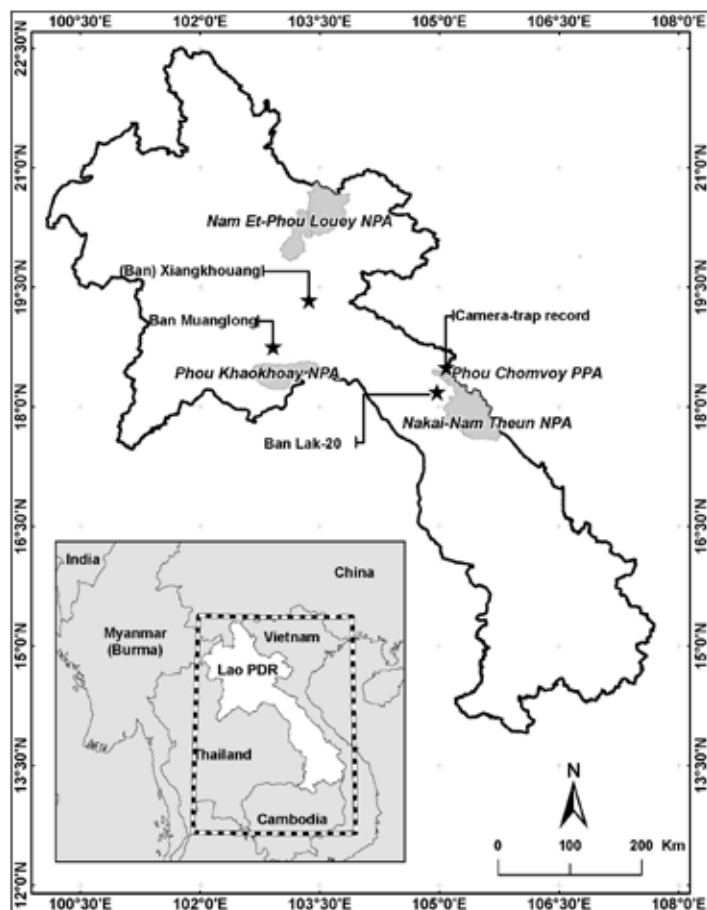


Fig. 2. Lao PDR, showing sites and protected areas mentioned in the text. *Owston's Civet* records come from all except Phou Khaokhoay NPA.

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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