

SHORT COMMUNICATION

A sighting of Yellow-bellied Weasel *Mustela kathiah* in southern Vietnam

Glenn E. MORRIS^{1*}

¹Wolfson Centre for Inherited Neuromuscular Disease, RJAH Orthopaedic Hospital, Oswestry, SY10 7AG, U.K.

Correspondence:

Glenn E. Morris
 glennmanc@hotmail.com

Associate editor:

Daniel Willcox

<http://www.smallcarnivoreconservation.org>
 ISSN 1019-5041

Abstract.

With only one record, with no precise location, elevation or habitat, the Yellow-bellied Weasel *Mustela kathiah*, is scarcely known in Southern Vietnam. Here I present a direct record of the species on Lam Dong province, Vietnam, and provide details on behaviour and habitat type for this rare species in the region.

Keywords: Lang Bian, Lam Dong, Yellow-bellied Weasel.

Yellow-bellied Weasel *Mustela kathiah* occurs along the Himalayas and into northern South-east Asia. It was formerly considered to be restricted in South-east Asia to the far-northern highlands (e.g., Corbet & Hill 1992). Its known distribution has been expanded greatly in South-east Asia in recent years, with the first records for Thailand (from multiple localities) and Cambodia and publication of a 1930s specimen from southern Lao PDR (Tizard 2002, Supparatvikorn *et al.* 2012, Chutipong *et al.* 2014, Phan *et al.* 2014). Abramov *et al.* (2013) analysed the chromosomes and DNA of a specimen from the Da Lat plateau, the first record from southern Vietnam, but gave no details of the location, altitude or habitat. This note reports a sighting from the plateau.

On 27 April 2016 I was walking down the main hiking trail from the Peak of Lang Bian, Lam Dong province, Vietnam (approximately 12°02'N, 108°26'E), alone at about 08h30, when I stopped to look for a Grey-bellied Tesia *Tesia cyaniventer* that was singing in the undergrowth of the closed-canopy broadleaved evergreen forest (altitude 1900–2000 m asl). I saw movement in the vegetation about 2–3 m from the track where I was standing, but was surprised to see the face of a weasel *Mustela* rather than of a bird. It looked like a very large Least Weasel *M. nivalis* (or a slender Stoat *M. erminea*), species with which I am familiar from observations in the U.K., but with a bushy tail nearly as long as the body. The clear view of the head and face at close range ruled out any kind of squirrel (Sciuridae). It bounded away a short distance (when I saw the tail clearly) and was joined by a second weasel almost side-by-side. The colour above was uniform light brown (head, body and tail) without any stripe or markings, assessed after the event as perhaps a little paler than the animal in Fig. 1 of Supparatvikorn *et al.* (2012). I did not see the underside of either (they were behaving like a

pair or family without aggression). I stood completely still for about 20 seconds, when one head popped up again, the body hidden by some kind of tree-stump that it seemed to be investigating. I watched it for about 10 seconds in this position, with binoculars, about 2 m away. I had the impression that the animals were unaware of my presence and behaving quite naturally. I did not investigate the possibility that they had a nest-hole behind the tree-stump, but their second disappearance, without obvious disturbance of surrounding vegetation, make this a possibility on reflection.

Given the observed morphology, of the three weasel' species in Vietnam, these animals could only be Yellow-bellied Weasel. Stripe-backed Weasel *M. strigidorsa* has an obvious pale dorsal stripe, and Bjorkegren's Weasel *M. (nivalis) tonkinensis* is the size of a Least Weasel, and is known only from one specimen in the far north (Groves 2007). Siberian Weasel *M. sibirica* occurs elsewhere in South-east Asia but has never yet been found in Vietnam (Robertson 2007); it invariably shows an obvious dark face mask. Although I did not specifically check for this marking, I am confident it was absent from the well-seen animal. Montane evergreen forest, the habitat in which this record occurred, is typical habitat of Yellow-bellied Weasel in its range in the Himalayas and northern South-east Asia (e.g. Chutipong *et al.* 2014).

Acknowledgements

Especial thanks to J. W. Duckworth for discussing the record, assisting with comparative information and his enthusiastic encouragement for submitting this report. Thank you also to the two anonymous reviewers who improved the quality of this manuscript.

References

- Abramov AV, Meschersky IG, Aniskin VM & Rozhnov VV. 2013. The Mountain Weasel *Mustela kathiah* (Carnivora: Mustelidae): molecular and karyological data. *Biology Bulletin* 40: 52–60.
- Chutipong W, *et al.* [23 authors]. 2014. Current distribution and conservation status of small carnivores in Thailand: a baseline review. *Small Carnivore Conservation* 51: 96–136.
- Corbet GB & Hill JE. 1992. *The mammals of the Indomalayan region*. Natural History Museum Publications and Oxford University Press, Oxford, U.K.
- Groves C. 2007. On some weasels *Mustela* from eastern Asia. *Small Carnivore Conservation* 37: 21–25.
- Phan C, Kamler JF & Macdonald DW. 2014. The first records of Yellow-bellied Weasel *Mustela kathiah* from Cambodia. *Small Carnivore Conservation* 50: 39–41.
- Robertson SI. 2007. *The status and conservation of small carnivores in Vietnam*. University of East Anglia, Norwich, U.K. (Ph.D. thesis).
- Supparatvithorn S, Sutasha K, Sirisumpun T, Kunthawong N Chutipong W & Duckworth JW. 2012. Discovery of the Yellow-bellied Weasel *Mustela kathiah* in Thailand. *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society* 58: 19–30.
- Tizard RJ. 2002. Records of little known small carnivores from Thailand, Lao PDR and southern China. *Small Carnivore Conservation* 26: 3.
- Verschuren J. 1958. *Ecologie et biologie des grands mammifères*. Fasc. 9, Mission H. De Saeger, Exploration du Parc National de la Garamba. Institut des Parc Nationaux du Congo Belge. Hayez, Bruxelles, Belgique.
- Woolgar J. 2014. A confirmed sighting of Pousargues's Mongoose *Dologale dybowskii*. *Small Carnivore Conservation* 51: 1–3.