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SHORT COMMUNICATION

Sighting of a Malay Weasel *Mustela nudipes* at Khlong Saeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Southern Thailand

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Abstract.

A Malay Weasel *Mustela nudipes* was photographed at Khlong Saeng Wildlife Sanctuary, southern Thailand on 10 February 2017. This represents a new locality but is within the known Sundaic range.

Keywords: Malay Weasel, *Mustela nudipes*, Khlong Saeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand, Sundaic region.

Malay Weasel *Mustela nudipes* has been recorded from various habitats, from disturbed to primary forests and across a wide range of elevations (Duckworth *et al.* 2006, Meijaard *et al.* 2016). Its distribution is limited to the Sundaic sub-region in South-east Asia (between approximately 10°N and 5°40 ' S, see Figure 1 in Duckworth *et al.* 2006). Duckworth *et al.* (2006) compiled records of Malay Weasel throughout its world range and traced few records from Thailand, as did Chutipong *et al.* (2014), in a national review of small carnivore status.

Khlong Saeng Wildlife Sanctuary (Khlong Saeng WS) is located in southern Thailand, between 9°01' and 9°22' N and 98°30' and 98°50' E. The 1,155 km^2 sanctuary ranges in altitude from 100 to 1,272 m asl (above sea level). The wildlife sanctuary's main habitat type is evergreen forest. An area of 165 km^2 of lowland evergreen forest was flooded by the Ratchaprapha reservoir in the south of the sanctuary (Nakhasathien 1989). The wet season occurs during April to November and the dry season occurs during December to March (DNP 2006).

On 10 February 2017, we walked a line transect survey for Galliformes around the Pha Pueng area (close to Tham Jear sub-station) in Khlong Saeng WS. The survey ran from 06h30 to 08h30. At 08h16, a Malay Weasel (Figure 1) was observed. The animal was scraping the ground, presumably searching for food. There was a noticeable smell, presumably released by the animal, when it fled. The sighting was at 9°09'03" N,

98°42’01” E, at an elevation of 320 m asl recorded on a GPS (Garmin GPSmap 62s). It was in little-disturbed evergreen forest with sparse ground cover, about 2 km from the reservoir.

This is the first record of a Malay Weasel from Khlong Saeng WS, although the location is inside the known range of the species (see Duckworth *et al.* 2006). Individual records with proper documentation such as this will improve understanding of weasel distribution and conservation status in mainland South-east Asia (e.g. Cheah 2016).

The smell, that was apparently released by the weasel, might be some sort of defence mechanism. Similar behaviour has been recorded in a captured Stripe-backed Weasel *Mustela strigidorsa* (Streicher *et al.* 2010). Once alerted to our presence, the weasel looked at the observers and then quickly fled, with its body almost flat to the ground. This behaviour might reduce detectability by conventional methods such as camera-trapping and may explain why so few records were traced by Chutipong *et al.* (2014). Indeed, several camera-trap surveys in Khlong Saeng WS did not record the species (Gibson *et al.* 2013, Chutipong *et al.* 2014, D. Ngoprasert verbally 2017).

Figure 1. Malay Weasel *Mustela nudipes* staring at observers after being encountered and photographed at Khlong Saeng Wildlife Sanctuary, southern Thailand, 10 February 2017.

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