Abstract

The occurrence of Stripe-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis* in the Similipal Hills, Odisha, India, has been confirmed by camera-trapping. This record extends the earlier known distribution range of this species, from southern and central Western Ghats in southwest India, far to the north of the Eastern Ghats and hence constitutes a biogeographically significant record.

*Keywords*: camera-trap, extension of known range, locality record, northernmost occurrence, Similipal

Stripe-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis*, the largest mongoose in Asia, is found in southwest India and Sri Lanka (Mudappa 2013). In India, its stronghold is believed to be the forested Western Ghats (Pocock 1941, Prater 1971, Corbet & Hill 1992, Van Rompaey & Jayakumar 2003, Mudappa 2013, Menon 2014). However, there is a report well outside the range of other records, from Horsley Konda (tentative location: 13°39′N, 78°25′E; perhaps about 750 m asl) in the Eastern Ghats (Allen 1911). As a sight-record without specimen, Allen (1911) himself expected, in keeping with the norms of the time, that his observation would be taken as unconfirmed. Thus, it was not mentioned even in Pocock’s (1941) comprehensive review. Van Rompaey & Jayakumar (2003) considered Allen’s record doubtful on grounds of habitat. Much further northeast, the species was reported by Mishra *et al.* (1996) from the state of Orissa (now called Odisha). They considered it restricted in the state to Similipal forest of Mayurbhanj district and Bhitarkanika mangroves of Kendrapara district. A later review of Orissa’s small carnivores, Acharjyo (1999), doubted these reports given that specimens were not obtained. Nor has the species found a place in the check-lists of Similipal Tiger Reserve (Anon. 1999). Hence, as of now, it is thought to be confined in India to the Western Ghats (Mudappa 2013, IUCN 2014, Menon 2014).

Six records (Table 1, Fig. 1) now confirm Stripe-necked Mongoose occurrence in Similipal Tiger Reserve (Similipal TR), Odisha, eastern India. The Similipal Hills (21°56′N, 86°00′E), in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, border the states of Jharkhand and West Bengal and harbour within their limits both a tiger reserve (of 2,750 km²) and a biosphere reserve (of 5,569 km²). The terrain is undulating at 300–1,200 m asl. Forest
During mammal observations in Similipal TR between 2006 and 2009, MVN twice saw large mongooses in the Upper Barakamura range: a fleeting glimpse of one crossing the Tarinibila road, and a distant sighting of a duo walking along the forest trail at Upper Barakamura. These were then thought to be exceptionally large Ruddy Mongooses *H. smithii*, primarily because of their black-tipped tails. With hindsight, the animals were *H. vitticollis*. The existence of *H. vitticollis* was confirmed by two images taken during extensive camera-trapping in Similipal TR during 2012 and 2013, at Jamuna and Hatisal (Figs 2–3). The photographs were incidental outcomes of camera-trapping primarily to estimate Tiger *Panthera tigris* numbers. No baits or lures were used. Most camera-traps were placed along main forest roads, while a few were placed on subsidiary feeder roads, stream courses and along existing animal trails. The records were in moist deciduous forest and semi-evergreen forest patches where human disturbance is minimal (Fig. 1). Most of the direct sightings were during daylight near hill streams or while the animals crossed forest roads.


These Stripe-necked Mongoose records from Similipal TR suggest that systematic surveys in and near the Eastern Ghats might find this mongoose elsewhere in the hill range. They lend support to Allen’s (1911) sight-record from Horsley Konda also in the Eastern Ghats, albeit 8° of latitude south of Similipal TR. Of the two known subspecies, the camera-trapped individuals resemble, as would be expected, the paler northern subspecies *H. v. inornatus*, not the darker richly coloured southern subspecies *H. v. vitticollis*. Similipal TR lies over seven degrees of latitude (almost 800 km) north of the northernmost historical specimen record of the species (and 1,400 km in direct north-east line): from Chipageri (then, Chipgi), Karnataka, in the Western Ghats at about 14°49′N, 74°55′E; Pocock 1941, Van Rompaey & Jayakumar 2003) and over 4° north of the recent records in west-central Maharashtra (Punjabi et al. 2014). These Stripe-necked Mongoose records echo recent extensions of known range such as for Asian Small-clawed Otter (*Mohapatra et al. 2014*), where species earlier thought to be disjunct in or endemic to the Western Ghats are discovered in the Eastern Ghats and parts of Deccan plateau. Hence this report is noteworthy in terms of a biogeographic perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality¹</th>
<th>Range²</th>
<th>Date, time</th>
<th>Coordinates; altitude (m); habitat³</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigirdha</td>
<td>Nawanaj</td>
<td>Not noted</td>
<td>21°53′34.0″N, 86°26′14.7″E; 828; MDDSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhudurchampa</td>
<td>Nawanaj</td>
<td>Not noted</td>
<td>21°51′28.03″N, 86°26′02.26″E; 844; MDDSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatisal Chhak*</td>
<td>Jenabil</td>
<td>5 Feb 2012, 13h17</td>
<td>21°42′38.58″N, 86°24′37.47″E; 781; MDDSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamuna Chhak*</td>
<td>Jenabil</td>
<td>21 Oct 2013, 07h10</td>
<td>21°42′49.27″N, 86°20′14.95″E; 907; MDDSF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarinibila</td>
<td>UBK</td>
<td>21 Jan 2007, 08h14</td>
<td>21°40′51.7″N, 86°20′58.8″E; 980; DSEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Barakamura</td>
<td>UBK</td>
<td>20 Apr 2008, 13h44</td>
<td>21°39′05″N, 86°18′40.6″E; 900; DSEF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Camera-trap records are asterisked (*); the others are direct sightings.
²UBK = Upper Barakamura range.
³Coordinates and altitudes were obtained from Garmin 72 Handheld GPS units under the datum WGS 84. MDDSF = moist-deciduous dense Sal forest; DSEF = dense Semi-evergreen forest.

Fig. 2. Stripe-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis*, Hatisal Chhak, Jenabil Range, Similipal Tiger Reserve, Odisha, India, 5 February 2012.

Fig. 3. Stripe-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis* from Jamuna Chhak, Jenabil Range Similipal Tiger Reserve, Odisha, India, 21 October 2013.

Table 1. Stripe-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis* records in Similipal Tiger Reserve, Odisha, India.
Acknowledgements

The authors express their gratitude to the field staff of Similipal Tiger Reserve for their support. They are also thankful to Divya Mudappa for her encouragement and inputs during the preparation of this paper.

References


Address correspondence to:

1Similipal Tiger Reserve, Baripada, Odisha, India. Email: anupnaya@gmail.com
2Nandankanan Zoological Park, Barang, Odisha, India. Email: manojnair74@gmail.com
3Govt Science College, Chhatrapur, Odisha, India. Email: pratyush.kingcobra@gmail.com