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NEW DISCOVERY!

A new species of ferret badger *Melogale* has been named from Vietnam

Ferret badgers *Melogale* are distributed in the Indochinese region (southern China, the eastern Himalayas and non-Sundaic South-east Asia), Java, Bali and north-east Borneo. Typically four species are recognised, all very similar in external morphology. In March 2005 a living ferret badger of different phenotype was confiscated by rangers from Cuc Phuong National Park, Vietnam (see photograph). It died and the carcass



Freshly-dead Cuc Phuong Ferret Badger *Melogale cucphuongensis* Nadler, Streicher, Stefen, Schwierz & Roos, 2011. Cuc Phuong National Park, Vietnam, March 2005. (Photo: Elke Schwierz)

was not preserved. In January 2006 a freshly dead individual of the same phenotype was found at the Endangered Primate Rescue Center, Cuc Phuong National Park (20°45'N, 105°43'E). These animals differ from the known species in several characteristics, and are named Cuc Phuong Ferret Badger *Melogale cucphuongensis* Nadler, Streicher, Stefen, Schwierz & Roos, 2011. The new species is sympatric with Small-toothed Ferret Badger *M. moschata* and Large-toothed Ferret Badger *M. personata* but differs clearly from both species in skull morphology and other features. It is smaller than the other ferret badger species, dorsally dark and ventrally buff in colour and has only very few very small white markings on the head and hindneck. Characteristic for the species is the elongated nose with a rhinarium that extends to the upper side of the nose and forms a small naked wedge. The snout is long, narrow and bends slightly upwards, and the mouth is set back a clear distance from the nose. Based on a 423 base-pair-long fragment of the mitochondrial cytochrome b gene, *M. cucphuongensis* is obviously within *Melogale* and represents a sister lineage to a clade containing at least *M. personata* and *M. moschata* (Bornean Ferret Badger *M. everetti* and Javan Ferret Badger *M. orientalis* were not included in the analysis). Whilst *M. personata* and *M. moschata* are very difficult to distinguish on external morphology, the new species is clearly different looking. Quite surprisingly the new species was found in Cuc Phuong National Park, a location, where fauna and flora have been studied for many years by many researchers. The finding clearly demonstrates the need to always remain alert and open for new discoveries.

Reference

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