

# First sighting of the Giant Genet *Genetta victoriae* in Rwanda

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## Abstract

A large genet photographed in 2005 in Nyungwe National Park, Rwanda, was identified as a Giant Genet *Genetta victoriae*, previously known with certainty only from the Democratic Republic of Congo and the adjacent part of Uganda and never before photographed in the wild.

*Keywords:* montane rainforest, Nyungwe National Park, spotlighting, Viverridae

## Première observation de la Genette Géante *Genetta victoriae* au Rwanda

## Résumé

Une genette de grande taille photographiée en 2005 dans le Parc National de Nyungwe au Rwanda, est identifiée comme représentant la Genette Géante *Genetta victoriae*; cette espèce n'était connue que de la République Démocratique du Congo et de la partie limitrophe de l'Ouganda, et n'avait jamais été photographiée dans la nature.

*Mots clés:* forêt ombrophile de montagne, Parc National de Nyungwe, spotlighting, Viverridae

Giant Genet *Genetta victoriae* Thomas, 1901 is an enigmatic carnivorous species, currently known with certainty only from northern and eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where it inhabits lowland and montane rainforests up to 2,000 m (Van Rompaey *et al.* 2008). It has been predicted to occur in Rwanda and Uganda, but there are no confirmed observations or museum specimens from outside DRC (Gaubert *et al.* 2006), except in Semiliki Forest in Uganda on the border with DRC (Bere 1962).

A captive specimen has been photographed by Rahm (1966), but there are no photos obtained in the wild, and no published information on wild animals, except for observations by Kingdon (1977) in Uganda, which appear questionable (Schreiber *et al.* 1989).

At 02h10 on 10 July 2005, a large genet was located by spotlighting in montane rainforest in Nyungwe National Park, Rwanda (2°29'S, 29°17'E), at the altitude of approximately 1,800 m. The animal was first observed on the ground, but it immediately climbed a tree, where it was photographed (Fig. 1). Then it jumped to another tree, returned to the ground and disappeared from view. Attempts to re-locate it on two subsequent nights were unsuccessful.

Colour patterns of dorsal pelage and feet were not clearly seen, but the thick, black-tipped tail with 6–7 narrow white rings indicates that this animal was most likely a Giant Genet *Genetta victoriae*. Other details, such as small lateral spots, a black line below the chin, and large ears, are consistent with this identification (see Gaubert *et al.* 2008). Four other genet species are known from the region (Gaubert *et al.* 2005). However, the tail of Aquatic Genet *G. piscivora* has no rings; the tail of Common Genet *G. genetta* has 8–9 broad bright rings and a bright tip; the tail of Rusty-spotted Genet *G. maculata* is thin, with 6–9 broad bright rings; the tail of Servaline Genet *G. servalina* is thin, with 9–11 bright rings and a bright tip (Gaubert *et al.* 2008).

Although there is a museum specimen of Giant Genet from a location in DRC (Kahuzi-Biéga National Park: 2°22'S, 28°45'E; Gaubert *et al.* 2006), which is less than 50 km from Nyungwe National Park, the photo provides the first documentation of this species's occurrence in Rwanda. This is a positive development for



Fig. 1. Giant Genet *Genetta victoriae* in Nyungwe National Park, Rwanda, 10 July 2005.

the species's conservation. Giant Genet is classified as a species of Least Concern by *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (Van Rompaey *et al.* 2008), and is known or expected to occur in a few protected areas in DRC (Gaubert *et al.* 2006), but Nyungwe National Park currently offers better protection than any protected areas in DRC (Hart & Jefferson 1996, Plumptre *et al.* 2002), where all genets are hunted for bushmeat and skins (Colyn *et al.* 1987).

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