

SHORT COMMUNICATION

A confirmed sighting of Pousargues's Mongoose *Dologale dybowskii* in Garamba National Park, Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract.

With less than a handful of observations, Pousargues's Mongoose *Dologale dybowskii* is one of the world's least known carnivores. This report describes a confirmed observation of Pousargues's Mongoose in Garamba National Park (Democratic Republic of the Congo) on the 2nd of October 2016, being only Garamba's first reported sighting in more than 50 years.

Résumé.

La mangouste de Dybowski *Dologale dybowskii* est considérée comme l'un des carnivores les moins connus du monde. Cette note décrit l'observation d'une mangouste de Dybowski au Parc National de la Garamba (République Démocratique du Congo) faite le 2 octobre 2016, étant seulement la première observation en plus de 50 années.

Keywords: Savannah mongoose, Nagero, Herpestidae, Sudano Guinean savannah, African Parks.

After a period of more than three decades without any reported observation in their currently known range in Africa, Pousargues's mongooses have been confirmedly seen in July 2013 at Semliki safari lodge, Uganda (Woolgar 2014), and between 2009 and 2015 in the Chinko reserve, Central African Republic (Aebischer *et al.* 2013, Thierry Aebischer, pers. comm. 2016). Except for these observations, the species is only known from 31 museum specimens and a handful of historical observations (Aebischer *et al.* 2015).

Carrying out a research on the local Kordofan giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum* population, I am currently based in Garamba National Park (Figure 1A). During a late morning walk, on October 2 2016, in the park management camp, I observed a single mongoose on a road towards the river, which I could not immediately identify (exact location: 3° 45' 18.5" N, 29° 31' 28.6" E; altitude: 737 m asl; Figure 1B). The animal had a generally brown body with a tint of ochre, a distinct grey head and a pink nose that was visible from the rather long distance I was standing (± 40 m). The grey head with pink nose and brown edges around the eyes gave a mask-like impression. Overall the mongoose had quite a compact body with short legs.



Figure 1. (A) Garamba National Park is located in the far north-eastern corner of the Democratic Republic of Congo and (B) exact location of the observation in close proximity of Garamba National Parks' headquarters (Source: Google Earth™).

After observing it with my binoculars, I could take a few pictures (Figures 2A–C) before the mongoose ran off in the vegetation. Having little experience with the family Herpestidae I had no idea of the identity of the species I had just observed, let alone its rarity. Later, when determining the observed mongoose based on the pictures, I assumed that it must have been a Pousargues's mongoose. Therefore, I got in contact with Chris and Mathilde Stuart who confirmed species' identity.

When looking at the pictures, the strongly developed claws (Figure 2A) and bushy tail (Figure 2B), as described in “The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals” by Jonathan Kingdon (1997) are present as well.



Figure 2. (A–C) Pousargues's Mongoose *Dologale dybowskii* at Garamba National Park, DR Congo, 2 October 2016 (Photos: M. D'haen).

The determination of the animal is based on the combination of characteristics mentioned above. Similar-looking species could be excluded. Dwarf mongoose *Helogale parvula* has similar looking characteristics and is probably the species with which Pousargues's mongoose is mostly confused with, but it has a more compact body and does not occur in Garamba National Park (Kingdon 1997).

Even though Garamba National park is historically known as a site of occurrence of Pousargues's Mongoose (Verschuren 1958, Stuart & Stuart 2013), this species had not been seen and/or reported in the last 50 years. However, this might well not be a representative reflection of its actual presence. Since Garamba National Park and surrounding areas were plagued by political instability, the park was focusing more on defending its wildlife against poachers and rather limited in energy to spend at inventories.

The park management camp lies roughly on a border zone of two vegetation types, being tropical wet savannah and wooded savannah, although the habitat type in the vicinity of the observation fits more onto wooded savannah (Figure 3). *Urelytrum giganteum*, *Piliostigma thoningii*, *Kigelia africana* and *Vitex doniana* are abundant species at the location where the animal was seen (Figure 1B). Several swamps with a high abundance of *Papyrus* *Cyperus papyrus* are in the direct proximity (<50 m) of the location the mongoose was seen. This habitat description is similar to the habitat type described by Aebischer *et al.* (2013), who reported savannah woodland as the most abundant habitat type. Other authors reported different habitat types as well. Aebischer *et al.* (2013) make notice of observations in thick riparian vegetation on the border of Lake Albert, while Stuart *et al.* (2008) reported observations in mountain forest grassland.



Figure 3. Habitat in which Pousargues's Mongoose *Dologale dybowskii* was detected at Garamba National Park, DR Congo (Photo: M. D'haen).

To conclude, this article describes the observation of a confirmed Pousargues's mongoose *Dologale dybowskii*, being one of only a handful of observations in the world and the first since more than 50 years for Garamba National Park. This does not necessarily mean that the species did not occur in the region during this period. The lack of reported observations in the region might fit with earlier assertions that the species' geographical distribution correlates with politically unstable regions (Aebischer *et al.* 2013) and that “not everyone takes a great deal of interest in most smaller animals” as Woolgar (2014) mentioned.

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