

The conservation status of mustelids and viverrids in Southern Africa

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Of the five species of mustelids and 16 species of viverrids known to occur in Southern Africa (defined here as being south of the Cunene and Zambezi Rivers) none are considered to be endangered, although several are rare, or so poorly known that their current status is difficult to ascertain.

Only one species, *Galerella pulverulenta*, is endemic to the region but it is widespread and common within its range. Two species, *Cynictis penicillata* and *Suricata suricatta*, occur only marginally outside the region in south-western Angola.

In the case of *Rhynchogale melleri* and *Bdeogale crassicauda*, both species have very limited distributional ranges within the region and require urgent surveys to establish exact ranges and habitat requirements. Likewise, *Paracynictis selousi*, although widespread within the north-eastern sector of the region is nowhere common and its lifestyle is poorly understood. *Nandinia binotata* has a very limited distribution in the forested areas of eastern Zimbabwe and the adjoining sector of Mozambique and its continued survival here will depend on the continued protection of this vegetation type.

Although all other species occurring in the region can be considered secure at present, a number of threats to their survival on a localised basis can be identified. A number of species are recognised as potential disease carriers, notably rabies, and these are *Suricata suricatta* and *Cynictis penicillata*. Although no specific programmes are aimed at their control, this is a possibility in the future and would almost certainly involve the use of non-selective poisons. A number of species, such as the genets, *Mellivora capensis*, *Aonyx capensis*, and *Atilax paludinosus* are frequently targeted by farmers for control because of their occasional predation on small domestic stock and poultry. However, at this stage only *M. capensis* seems to have been significantly reduced in some area by these programmes. Of more concern is the generalised application of non-selective problem animal control programmes, particularly in South Africa, which frequently has an adverse effect on certain non-target species. Unfortunately, no detailed assessment of impact has been undertaken in the region but species most frequently killed in Cape Province, South Africa, are *Galerella pulverulenta*, *Cynictis penicillata*, *Atilax paludinosus*, and the two genet species. There is an urgent need to assess the role of these non-selective methods on the overall health of all carnivore populations.

In the case of *Lutra maculicollis* the major factor influencing its well being would appear to be the changing water quality in a number of river systems. Being principally a "sight hunter" this otter is largely dependent on clear water. Agricultural mismanagement has resulted in a number of rivers having high siltloads and therefore greatly reduced visibility. This factor would appear to

have had a detrimental effect on the populations of this otter occurring in the Cape Province.

In summary it can be accepted that none of the mustelids and viverrids occurring in Southern Africa are endangered but several species have very limited distributions within the region and can be classified as rare. Although most species have extensive distributions in the sub-continent the continued use of non-selective problem animal control methods, particularly in South Africa and southern Namibia, could lead to considerable depletion of numbers of small carnivores on a localised basis. The southern African region is home to 50% of all the viverrid species occurring on the African continent and 45% of all mustelids.

Any individual, or institution, requiring additional information on the viverrids and mustelids of Southern Africa is welcome to contact the African Carnivore Survey.

List of the 5 species of mustelids and 16 species of viverrids known to occur in Southern Africa:

Mustelids

- Aonyx capensis* - Cape clawless otter
- Lutra maculicollis* - Spotted-necked otter
- Poecilogale albinucha* - Striped weasel
- Ictonyx striatus* - Striped polecat
- Mellivora capensis* - Honey badger

Viverrids

- Mungos mungo* - Banded mongoose
- Rhynchogale melleri* - Meller's mongoose
- Bdeogale crassicauda* - Bushy-tailed mongoose
- Paracynictis selousi* - Selous' mongoose
- Galerella pulverulenta* - Small grey mongoose
- Galerella sanguinea* - Slender mongoose
- Herpestes ichneumon* - Large grey mongoose
- Atilax paludinosus* - Water mongoose
- Helogale parvula* - Dwarf mongoose
- Ichneumia albicauda* - White-tailed mongoose
- Cynictis penicillata* - Yellow mongoose
- Suricata suricatta* - Suricate
- Genetta genetta* - Small-spotted genet
- Genetta tigrina* - Large-spotted genet
- Civettictis civetta* - African civet
- Nandinia binotata* - Two-spotted palm civet

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