

Note on the White-tailed mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) in southern Arabia

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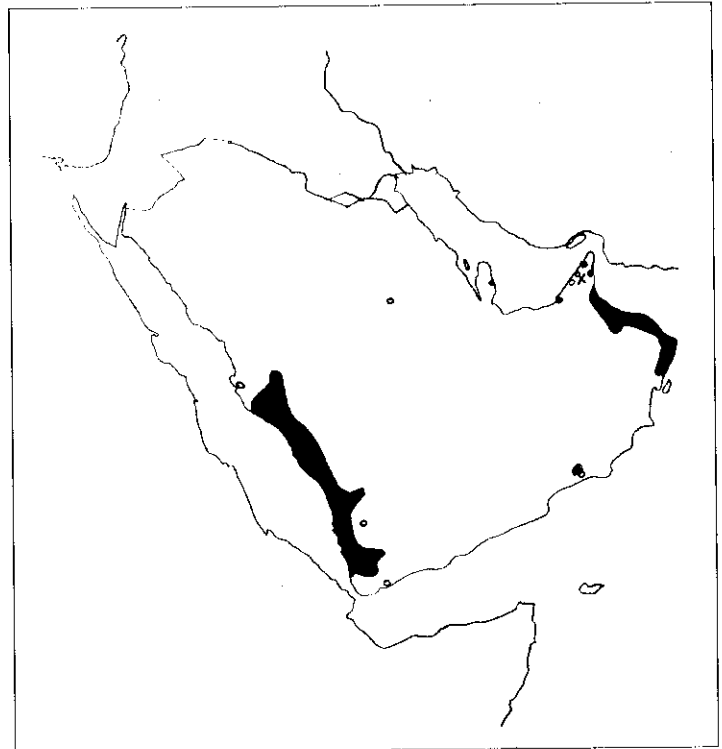
The white-tailed mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) is a large herpestid (3.5 to 5.2 kg), with long, coarse and shaggy brown-grey coloured pelage, and the bushy tail being predominantly white. Despite its large size there seem to be only 27 confirmed records of this mongoose through its southern Arabian range (Gasperetti *et al.*, 1985; Harrison *et al.*, 1991), 12 from south-western Saudi Arabia, nine from Oman, four from Yemen, and two from the north of the United Arab Emirates.

When these localities are plotted on a map they show a concentration on the coastal plain and adjacent mountains of south-western Saudi Arabia and Yemen, an apparently isolated location in the Dhofar of Oman and a second concentration along the Batinah coastal plain and adjacent interior of northern Oman. Within the northern United Arab Emirates the two records noted by Gasperetti *et al.* (1985) were apparently of live animals collected close to the towns of Ras al Khaymah and Fujayrah. Over the past three years the authors have undertaken extensive wildlife surveys throughout the northern Emirates but it was only in November of 1997 that we were able to confirm the continued presence of this mongoose in the region.

Tracks of the white-tailed mongoose were located at several points along a twenty-kilometre stretch of the well-watered and vegetated Wadi Shawka (Sharjah Emirate), that runs through the southernmost extension of the Shimayliyah Mountains. The locality centres on 40°45.6' E; 27°76.1' N (UTM Map Datum Nahrwan) at an altitude of some 300 metres ASL. Cage traps, baited with dead quail and Schneekluth Canine Call scent lure, were set at several places where fresh tracks were found and on 20 November an adult mongoose was caught. In external appearance it was identical to animals we have observed in southern and eastern Africa. This animal was transferred to the Desert Park Endangered Species Breeding Centre, Sharjah. Although difficult to assess with accuracy we feel that between three and six animals are present in the section of wadi we surveyed. It has been brought to our attention that two apparent white-tailed mongooses were killed in a plantation in the settlement of Siji early in 1997, lying approximately six kilometres from the survey site, by Asian labourers who ate them. We have been told that the skin of one animal has been seen by a reliable observer (C. Gross, pers. comm.) and confirmed as being of this species.

Although the white-tailed mongoose would appear to have a broken distribution in southern Arabia we feel that a suitable habitat occurs in the area between the Batinah and Dhofar of Oman, and south-westwards to Yemen through the Hadramawt, it is considered highly likely that its range will be found to be more or less continuous. The lack of records from the intervening areas can be largely explained, we feel, by the fact that both the Dhofar and Hadramawt are zoologically under-explored.

An additional white-tailed mongoose locality (dead on road) from within its known Yemeni range was recorded by the authors on 18 April 1996: 16°02.25' N, 43°10.90' E, at an altitude of 170 metres. The area was dominated by dry mixed thorn scrub, cultivated lands and wide sand-bottomed wadis. A specimen of this mongoose collected as a road casualty by J. E. Gibbs (April 1993), and assigned Oman Natural History Museum No. 2175,



Ichneumia albicauda in the Arabian peninsula. Shaded areas: existing records; X: new record.

came from between Qalhat and Tiwi on the Batinah coastal road (22°43' N, 59°21' E) of northern Oman, within its currently known range.

Measurements (in mm) of three live-trapped Ichneumia albicauda from Wadi Shawka, U.A.E.

Sex	Total length	Tail length	Hind foot(su)	Ear
Male	902	362	110	22
Female	834	334	98	25.4
Female	880	370	104	25

All were adult animals and as far as we are aware the only representatives of this species to have been measured from the United Arab Emirates, the most easterly limit of their distribution. All average slightly smaller than the very limited sample detailed by Harrison & Bates (1991) from individuals measured from Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Oman. All three specimens had the typical colouration of this large mongoose.

References

- Gasperetti, J., Harrison, D. L. & Buttiker, W. 1985. The carnivora of Arabia. *Fauna of Saudi Arabia* 7: 397-461.
Harrison, D. L. & Bates, P. J. 1991. *The mammals of Arabia*. Harrison Zoological Museum, Sevenoaks, Kent, UK.

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