

ENDANGERED CIVETS OF WESTERN GHATS

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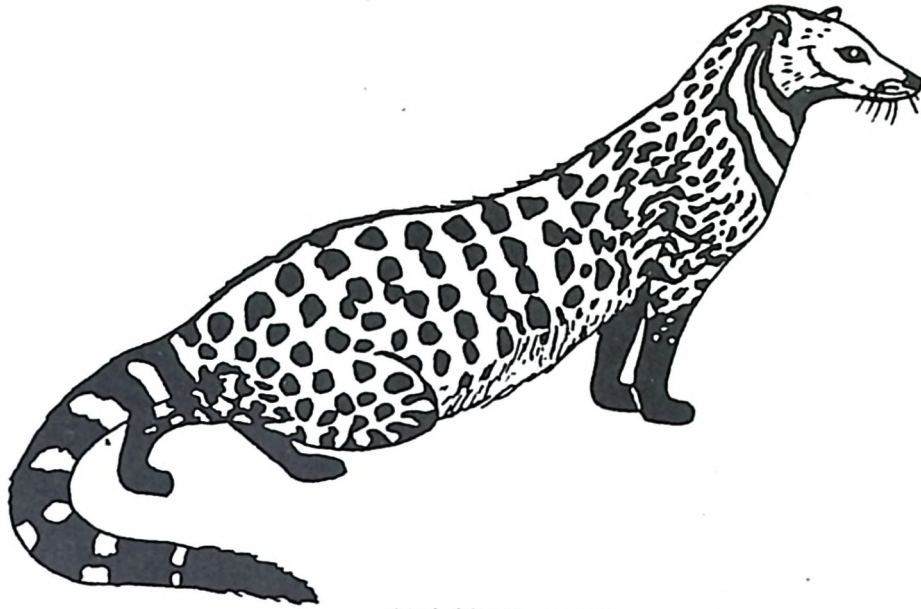
While on a silent night walk through a well protected evergreen forest in Western Ghats with a powerful spot light it is possible to see several species of mammals. Two of the most common medium sized carnivores among them would be the common palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*) and the small Indian civet (*Vivericula indica*). The common palm civet or Toddy cat is a skillful climber. Its sharp curved retractile claws and the long tail, which is used for bracing against the tree, help the animal in climbing. Although omnivorous, palm civets feed largely on fruits. This species is widely distributed in South East Asia. The small Indian civet is a tawny grey or grayish brown animal lined and streaked on back and spotted more or less in rows along the flanks. There are usually some cross bars on the neck. It is found through out India and omnivorous in food habits. In addition to these two, Western ghats has two more civets - the Malabar civet (*Viverra civettina*) and the Brown palm civet (*Paradoxurus jerdoni*) which are little known to science. Their status is said to be critically endangered.

The carnivorous civets come in the family Viverridae which is represented by eight species in India. The other four are Himalayan palm civet (*Paguma larvata*), Binturong (*Arctictis binturong*), Spotted Linsang or Tiger civet (*Prionodon pardicolor*) and the Large Indian civet (*Viverra zibetha*). The status and ecology of these species also remain little known.

Man's interest in civets is largely because of the civet oil which is a secretion of the perineal gland associated with genitalia. Civet oil is cherished in the perfumery industry because of its odour and ability to exalt other aromatic compounds. In many places in South India still people keep small Indian civets in cages, at periodic intervals restrain them by man-handling and scoop out the secretion by a special spoon. For the civets the secretion of the perineal gland has sex related functions. It carries information indicative of sex, age and individual identity.

The Mustelid and Viverrid Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) has stated in their action plan that a survey and an ecological study of the western ghats endemic viverrids is one of their priority projects. On their request the Institute has organised a three month field study of the Malabar civet and the Brown palm civet and the work is being carried out by Dr.N.V.Ashraf Kunhunu with financial assistance from the Zoological Society for the Conservation of Species and Population, Munchen, Federal Republic of Germany. The study will be conducted from April to June 1990 in three representative areas of Western ghats - Elayur in Kerala, Kudremukh in Karnataka and Anamalais in Tamil Nadu. The vegetation in Elayur is degraded, dry and moist deciduous forests with coconut and rubber plantations and Kudremukh

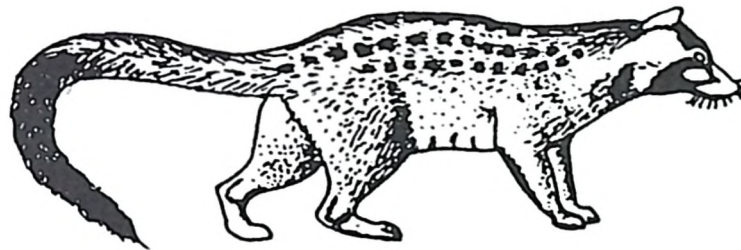
CIVETS OF WESTERN GHATS



MALABAR CIVET
VIVERRA CIVETTINA



SMALL INDIAN CIVET
VIVERRICULA INDICA



PALM CIVET
PARADOXURUS HERMAPHRODITUS



BROWN PALM CIVET
PARADOXURUS JERONI

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has rainforest interspersed with patches of grassland. In Anamalais the rain forest has patches of moist deciduous forests and teak plantations. The major reason for selecting these areas is that Dr.Kurup of Zoological Survey of India has obtained a fresh skin of Malabar civet in Elayur in 1987, Mr.Ullas Karanth of Centre for Wildlife Studies, Mysore, has sighted a Malabar civet in Kudremukh and one of us (Dr.Ajith Kumar) in 1989 has seen and photographed a Brown palm civet in Anamalais.

The survey work by Dr.Kunhunu has started with a visit to the museum of Zoological Survey of India (Calicut) to examine the skin of the Malabar civet. The field work will be done in all the three places for 20 days at each survey area. A brochure with the pictures of Malabar civet and related species will be shown to the local people to elicit

relevant information from them. Survey will be made during night hours in different vegetation types (on foot and by vehicle) using spotlights to locate civets and estimate their density. Wherever possible attempts will be made to follow the civets to collect data on their behaviour.

Malabar civet and similar endangered species still pose the challenges faced and enjoyed by the natural history explorers of bygone past. It is likely that we may lose such species even without knowing the basic facts about their ecology. It is hoped that the survey in progress would give us enough information to plan long-term conservation oriented research to save the endangered civets of Western ghats and their beautiful habitats. Any information from those familiar with Western ghats and civets will be greatly appreciated.

**WII ALUMNI
Addresses Requested**

We are trying to send copies of the WII Newsletter to all the alumni of the Wildlife Institute of India. We are facing some problem in this regard as we do not have the present postal addresses of many of them.

If you happen to be a person who has undergone a training programme at WII. please, rush your present postal address (in block capital letters) to the Editor, WII Newsletter.