Ichneumia albicauda – White-tailed Mongoose


Warwick & Michèle Tarboton

Regional Red List status (2016)	Least Concern
National Red List status (2004)	Least Concern
Reasons for change	No change
Global Red List status (2015)	Least Concern
TOPS listing (NEMBA) (2007)	None
CITES listing	None
Endemic	No

Similar to other mongoose species, in captivity White-tailed Mongooses are known to break eggs by throwing them backwards onto a hard object using their hind limbs (Baker 1997).

Taxonomy

Ichneumia albicauda (G. [Baron] Cuvier 1829)

ANIMALIA - CHORDATA - MAMMALIA - CARNIVORA - HERPESTIDAE - *Ichneumia* - *albicauda*

Common names: White-tailed Mongoose (English), Witstertmuishond (Afrikaans), Ubuchakide (Ndebele), Jerenyenje (Shona), Liduha (Swazi), Tlolota (Tsonga), Lesalamotlhaka, Lesêlamotlhaka, Mokala, Mosalamotlhaka, Mosêlamotlhaka, Sesêlamotlhaka (Tswana), Mutsherere (Venda), Ingqwalashu (Xhosa), Gqalashu (Zulu)

Taxonomic status: Species

Taxonomic notes: This species is occasionally mistaken with Meller's Mongoose (*Rhynchogale melleri*), which also sometimes has a white tail. However, the White-tailed Mongoose is usually larger, and its body appears black, rather than brown (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Further confusion in identification is sometimes created by the fact that *Ichneumia albicauda* individuals with black tails (Photo 1) have been recorded in several areas of the African distribution range (A. Page pers. comm. 2014; C. Wright pers. comm. 2014). Only one subspecies has been listed from southern Africa, *I. a. grandis* (Thomas 1890), but the nominate form has a wide distribution across much of the rest of Africa (Meester et al. 1986).

Assessment Rationale

The White-tailed Mongoose is listed as Least Concern since it is common through much of its wide range, present even in human-modified habitats, and feeds opportunistically. Therefore, there is little reason to believe that it is currently threatened.

Regional population effects: Dispersal of this species across regional borders between South Africa and Zimbabwe and Mozambique is possible, as its range is continuous across much of southeast Africa and this species is not constrained by fences.

Distribution

The White-tailed Mongoose is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa from Senegal and Gambia to the Horn of Africa, and then southwards to southeast South Africa (Taylor 2013). Extralimital to the African continent, it is present along much of the coast of Saudi Arabia to Oman and also recorded from Farasan Kabir Island in the Red Sea, where they may have been introduced (Taylor 2013). It ranges from sea level to 3,500 m asl in Ethiopia (Admasu et al. 2004).

In southern Africa, it ranges marginally into the extreme northeastern parts of Namibia, in northern Botswana, and through most of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, aside from the more arid regions (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Within the assessment region, the species occurs in the eastern lowveld of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, southwards to KwaZulu-Natal, the Free State and the Eastern Cape as far as Addo Elephant National Park. In the North West Province, the species is thought to have significantly expanded its range westward, the furthest recorded sighting being Westend Dam, near Setlagole (Power 2014).

Population

This species is considered common, and in some parts of its southern African range is considered one of the most common small carnivores (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Densities as high as 4.3 individuals / km^2 were reported from the Serengeti (Waser 1980). Considering the relatively wide distribution of this species and a minimum average density of at least 0.1 individual / km^2, we estimate that there are well over 10,000 mature individuals in the assessment region.

Current population trend: Unknown, but probably stable based on wide extent of occurrence and lack of threats.

Continuing decline in mature individuals: Unknown, but probably not.

Number of mature individuals in population: Probably > 10,000

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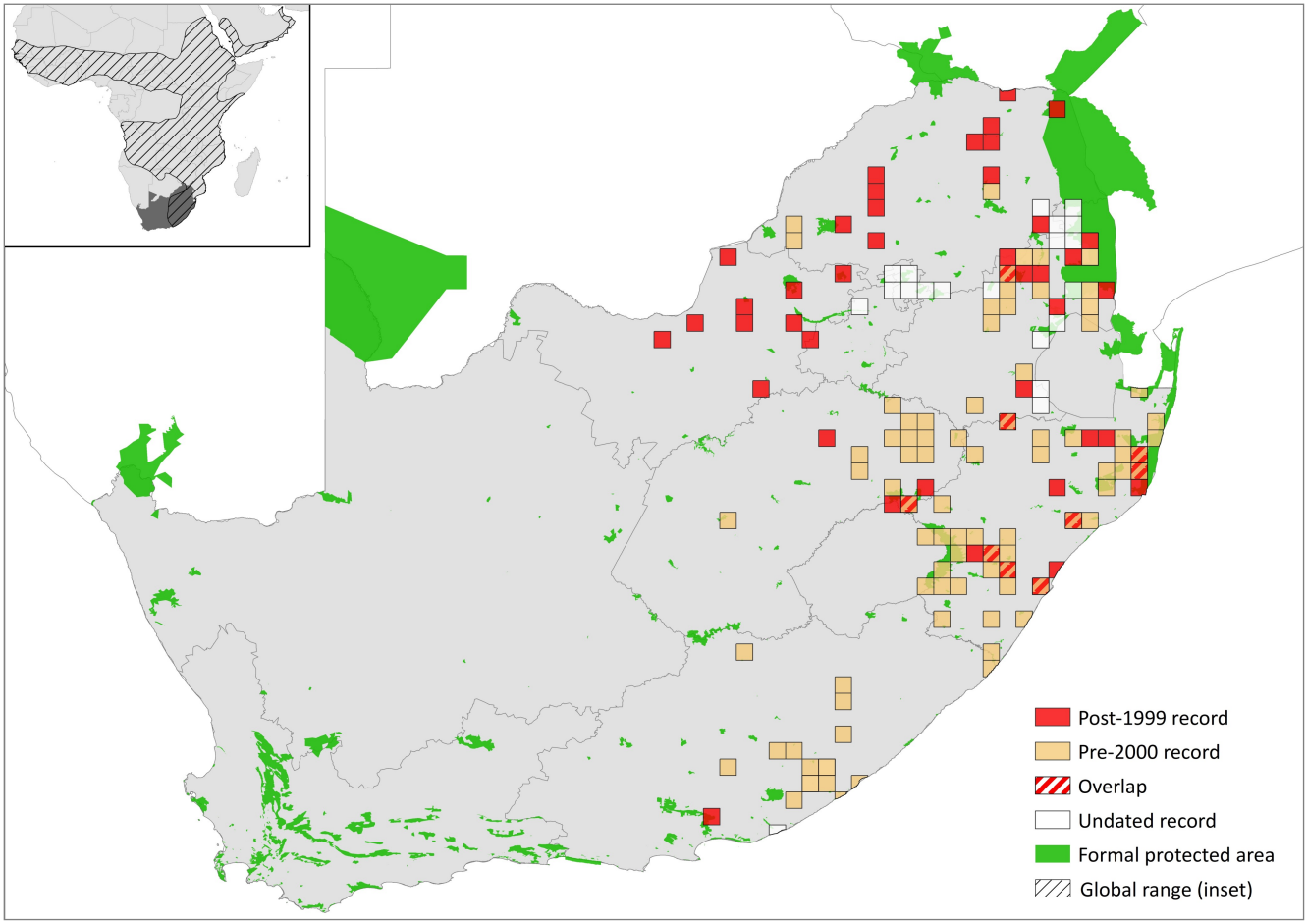

Figure 1. Distribution records for White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) within the assessment region

Table 1. Countries of occurrence within southern Africa

Country	Presence	Origin
Botswana	Extant	Native
Lesotho	Extant	Native
Mozambique	Extant	Native
Namibia	Extant	Native
South Africa	Extant	Native
Swaziland	Extant	Native
Zimbabwe	Extant	Native

Number of mature individuals in largest subpopulation: Unknown

Number of subpopulations: It is not currently possible to determine the extent or number of subpopulations.

Severely fragmented: No. This species can exist in multiple habitats, including agricultural lands, rural gardens and urban areas. Additionally, its range may be increasing with the rise of wildlife ranching.

Habitats and Ecology

The White-tailed Mongoose occurs in well-watered grasslands, savannah and woodland areas, but is absent from moist forested areas, high altitudes above the treeline, deserts and semi-deserts (Taylor 2013). Generally preferring humid or sub-humid areas, this species is restricted from the drier expanses of the Succulent and Nama Karoo biomes of the assessment region (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). It is adaptable to human-modified habitats, with individuals often found around towns and villages where they feed opportunistically on garbage (Taylor 2013). In Oman it has been found associated with gardens and plantations (Harrison & Bates 1991).

This species is primarily insectivorous. Termites, grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and beetle larvae constitute a high percentage of its diet (Rowe-Rowe 1978; Smithers & Wilson 1979; Stuart 1981; Rautenbach 1982). Amphibians, reptiles and murid rodents may also supplement its diet (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Although the White-tailed Mongoose is nocturnal, with active behaviour extending well into the night, occasional diurnal behaviour is not unheard of (Stuart 1981). In Ethiopia, resting sites during the day were located amongst rocks or even in empty buildings (Admasu et al. 2004), but termitaria, disused Aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*) or Springhare (*Pedetes capensis*) holes are also commonly utilised as dens (Skinner & Chimimba 2005).

This species is primarily solitary, but small family groups or pairs are occasionally observed at night (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). In an agricultural landscape of the Ethiopian Highlands, a study into the spatial ecology of this species found the average size of three adult male home ranges to be 3.2 km^2, while an individual female home range was recorded as 2.6 km^2 (Admasu et al. 2004). The male home ranges showed very little (2%) overlap with one another, however, the female's home range was found to overlap with those of the two adjacent male home ranges by 81% and 25%, respectively (Admasu et al. 2004). A home range in Kenya was recorded at 8 km^2 (Baker 1997).

Photo 1. Confusingly, some White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) individuals have a black tail (Alex Page)

Little is known of the reproductive seasonality of this species. However, in Zimbabwe pregnant and lactating females were recorded from October to February (Shortridge 1934); and Rowe-Rowe (1978) recorded both a lactating female and a pregnant female in November in KwaZulu-Natal. Litter size is suggested to be 1–4 young (Taylor 2013), but Skinner and Chimimba (2005) recommend an average litter size of 1.4. The gestation period is estimated at 2 months (Baker 1997).

Ecosystem and cultural services: This species may predate on pest species, for example, a captive female White-tailed Mongoose was known to predate on House Rats (*Rattus rattus*) up to 180 g in mass (Smithers 1983).

Use and Trade

Although this species is not known to be utilised as bushmeat within the assessment region, Taylor (1972) suggested that humans were probably the major predator on adult White-tailed Mongooses. There may be limited or opportunistic use of White-tailed Mongoose skins for traditional ceremonial purposes in Venda villages of the Limpopo Province (C. Stuart & M. Stuart pers. obs. 1985–1986).

Threats

There are no major threats to the species. It may be caught or poisoned incidentally in predator control programmes principally aimed at Black-backed Jackal (*Canis mesomelas*) and Caracal (*Caracal caracal*) (Taylor 2013).

Current habitat trend: Stable. Wildlife ranching is thought to have had a positive effect on this species by conserving more suitable habitat and helping to connect subpopulations through game farming areas. Research is, however, needed to confirm this notion.

Conservation

The White-tailed Mongoose is present in many protected areas across its range. No conservation interventions are currently deemed necessary within the assessment region, but monitoring is recommended. This species is likely to benefit from the expansion of protected areas to connect suitable habitat patches.

Recommendations for land managers and practitioners:

- Create conservancies to protect and connect habitat.

Research priorities:

- Monitoring subpopulations to determine population size and trends.
- General studies on the biology and ecology of this species in different habitat types.

Encouraged citizen actions:

- Report sightings on virtual museum platforms (for example, iSpot and MammalMAP), especially outside protected areas. As confusion with other mongoose species is possible, a photograph is required for confirmation of identification.

Data Sources and Quality

Table 3. Information and interpretation qualifiers for the White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) assessment

Data sources	Field study (literature, unpublished), indirect information (literature, unpublished, expert knowledge)
Data quality (max)	Estimated
Data quality (min)	Inferred
Uncertainty resolution	Best estimate
Risk tolerance	Evidentiary

References

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Table 2. Threats to the White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) ranked in order of severity with corresponding evidence (based on IUCN threat categories, with regional context)

Rank	Threat description	Evidence in the scientific literature	Data quality	Scale of study	Current trend
1	*5.1.2 Hunting & Collecting Terrestrial Animals*: species killed unintentionally through poisoning and snaring to control damage-causing animals.	-	Anecdotal	-	Stable

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Details of the methods used to make this assessment can be found in *Mammal Red List 2016: Introduction and Methodology.*