

African Striped Weasel *Poecilogale albinucha*



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Namibian conservation status	Near Threatened
Global IUCN status	Least Concern
Namibian range	Marginal. Historic records show a small area of occurrence in south-eastern Namibia. Also recorded in Zambezi Region
Global range	Sub-Saharan Africa, excluding forests of the Congo basin and the southern coast of West Africa
Population estimate	Unknown
Population trend	Unknown
Habitat	Mainly savanna, but has been recorded in a wide range of other habitats from rainforest to semi-desert grasslands elsewhere in Africa
Threats	None

IDENTIFYING FEATURES

The African striped weasel is a very small carnivore with an elongated body, short legs and relatively bushy tail. The body is black with a white cap and tail, and four off-white or yellowish stripes run from the nape of the neck to the base of the tail. It is similar to the striped polecat, but this species is smaller and more slender with shorter fur.

DISTRIBUTION

African striped weasels are known to occur in a wide variety of habitats in central and southern Africa, but little is known of their distribution in Namibia. The latest IUCN assessment for the species shows a range extending only into a small area of south-eastern Namibia up to Leonardville in the Omaheke Region (Smithers 1983, Stuart *et al.* 2015b). Shortridge (1934) notes a specimen from the confluence of the Nossob and Molopo Rivers on the Botswana side of the border. These records explain the small area of expected range in south-eastern Namibia along the ephemeral Nossob and Olifants Rivers. Earlier range maps include the Zambezi Region (Larivière 2001). On the Atlasing in Namibia database (Environmental Information Service 2021), there are very few records.

POPULATION ESTIMATE AND TREND

Observation records are so few that a population estimate in Namibia is impossible (Do Linh San *et al.* 2013).

ECOLOGY

Little is known about African striped weasels in the wild, as they are not easily observed (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Some observational studies of captive individuals revealed that they are proficient diggers but poor climbers, and they specialise on small mammal prey, particularly rodents (Rowe-Rowe 1972, Smithers 1983). Captive weasels usually became active at sundown and were chiefly nocturnal, but Smithers (1983) also recorded extensive diurnal activity in cool weather.

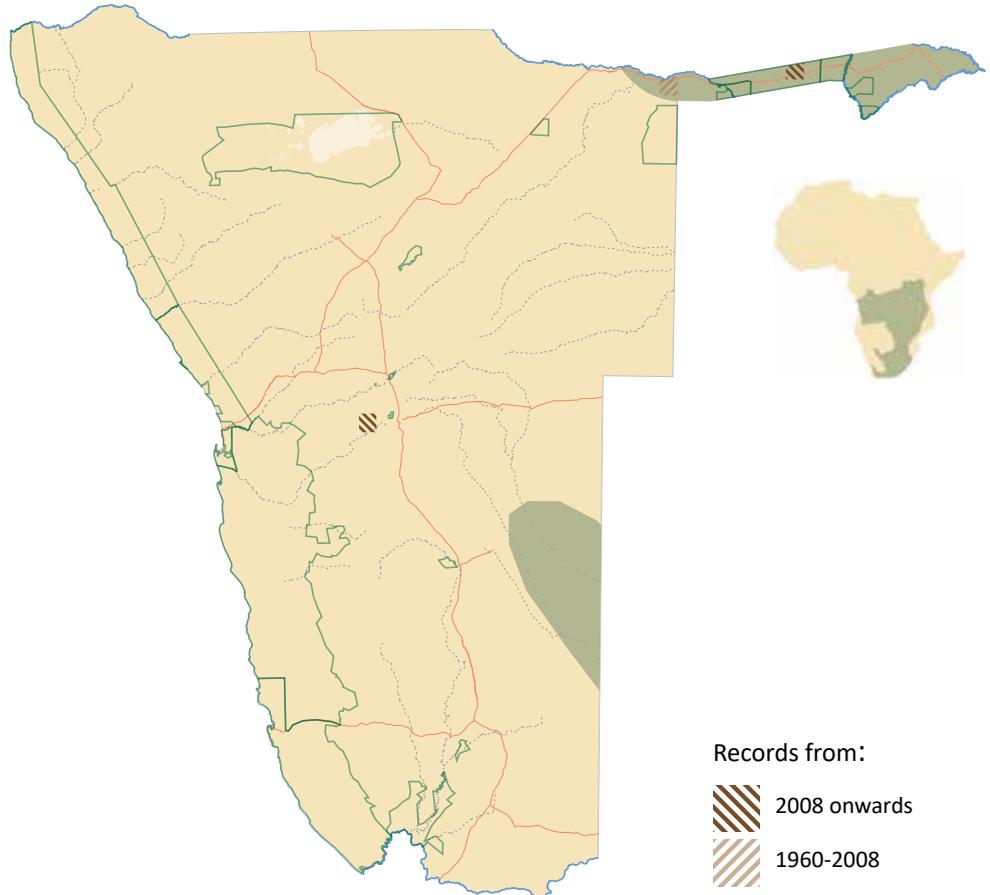
African striped weasels appear to be solitary, with females and males only coming together to mate during spring and summer (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Females usually give birth to a litter of 1–3 naked young per season, which are fully grown at 20 weeks; a second litter may be produced if the first fails (Skinner & Chimimba 2005).

Although our knowledge of the striped weasel's ecological

Distribution records of African striped weasel, and present estimated area of distribution in Namibia.

Inset: African distribution of African striped weasel according to IUCN (Stuart *et al.* 2015b).

The Namibian distribution in the main map is more up to date and does not necessarily agree with the distribution shown in the inset.



role is scant, it is likely that they provide ecosystem services through burrowing (Rodgers *et al.* 2017) and preying on rodents. There is some evidence from South Africa that black-backed jackals prey on this species when other food sources are scarce (Do Linh San *et al.* 2009), and this may be true for other medium-sized carnivores.

THREATS

There are no known threats to this species in Namibia. Nonetheless, studies from South Africa indicate that this species is hunted for use in Zulu and Xhosa traditional medicine (Cunningham & Zondi 1991, Simelane & Kerley 1998). Whether or not striped weasels are used for traditional medicine in Namibia or other neighbouring countries is unknown.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern. The African striped weasel was listed as Least Concern in the IUCN international Red List in 2015 (Stuart *et al.* 2015b), which is the same listing as in previous assessments in 1996 and 2008 (Stuart *et al.* 2008b). It is considered Near Threatened in South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho (Child *et al.* 2016), and Least Concern in Angola (Huntley *et al.* 2019).

ACTIONS

Our knowledge of this species is very limited in Namibia. In particular, whilst it is thought to prefer moist savanna and grasslands with >600 mm of rainfall per year in other countries (Skinner & Chimimba 2005), there are two records in Namibia from areas with <400 mm of rainfall per year. Research is therefore required to establish the distribution and habitat requirements for this species in Namibia.

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Reviewer: Emmanuel Do Linh San

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