Black Mongoose *Galerella nigrata*

Namibian conservation status	Least Concern
Global IUCN status	Least Concern (since 1996)
Namibian range	North-western and north-central Namibia in appropriate habitat
Global range	Namibia and southern Angola
Population estimate	Unknown
Population trend	Unknown
Habitat	Restricted to habitats dominated by large granite boulders and the drainages and woodlands connecting them
Threats	▸ No major threats ▸ Hunting where perceived as a predator ▸ Hybridisation with the slender mongoose in farming community areas where these species encounter one another regularly as they are attracted to scavenging and easy (chicken) hunting opportunities

IDENTIFYING FEATURES

The black mongoose, also known as the Kaokoland slender mongoose, is similar in size and shape to the slender mongoose. Found in north-western and north-central Namibia, these mongooses have a very dark, nearly black pelage (hence *"nigrata"*)- yet with a distinctive rufous tinge in sunlight (Crawford-Cabral 1996, Tromp 2011, Taylor 2013a). A mongoose, *Herpestes flavescens*, with a tan or yellowish pelage (hence "flavescens") is confined to similar habitats in south-western Angola. It is currently unknown whether this mongoose is of the same species

The only other mongoose in Namibia that is as dark coloured is the dwarf mongoose. That is a much smaller animal (adults about half the total length of a black mongoose) and it has a less slender appearance and a less hairy tail. Dwarf mongooses are usually seen in social groups, whereas the black mongoose is mainly solitary.

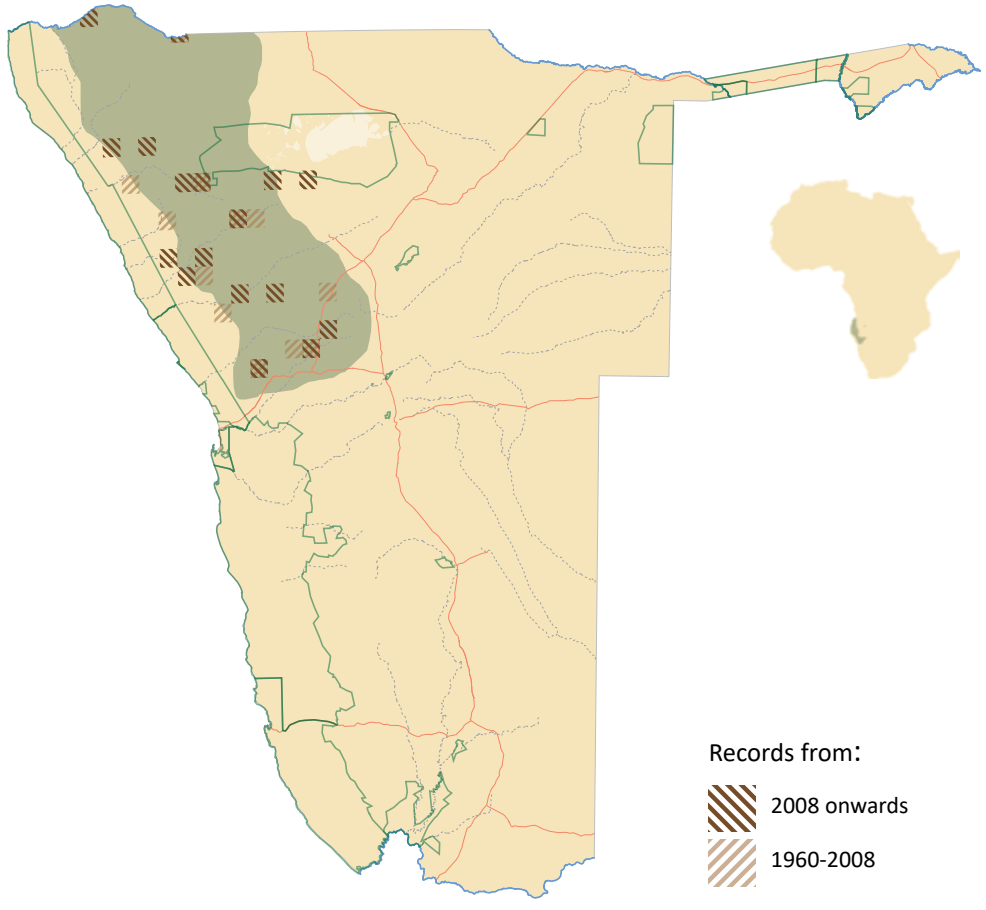
DISTRIBUTION

In north-western Namibia, this species is restricted to habitats dominated by large granitic boulders, and the drainages and woodlands connecting them. This results in a fragmented distribution (Shortridge 1934, Rathbun & Cowley 2008, Rapson *et al.* 2013). It is likely that Angolan populations have similar habitat preferences to their Namibian counterparts. In Namibia, genetic data suggest that populations of this mongoose are linked, despite the isolation of their preferred rocky habitats (Rapson *et al.* 2013).

Distribution records of black mongoose, and present estimated area of distribution in Namibia.

Inset: African distribution of black mongoose according to IUCN (Rapson & Rathbun 2015).

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



POPULATION ESTIMATE AND TREND

Black mongooses are common within protected areas and appear to adapt well to low-intensity tourism activities, remaining elusive but relatively common. The encroachment of local communities with dogs and livestock has, however, led to the disappearance of this species from several areas in northern Namibia, such as the granite inselbergs adjacent to Twyfelfontein. Surveys conducted within these communities suggest that this could be a result of dog predation and trapping of mongooses by local communities in order to reduce chicken losses (Tromp 2011).

Densities appear to be highly variable depending on the terrain and land use in the area. Due to their elusive nature it is difficult to get robust density estimates and further research is needed before we can comment on population trends.

ECOLOGY

Studies of *G. nigrata* in Namibia have revealed that it is predominantly solitary. Home ranges are generally 0.12–1.5 km^2 (although they may be up to 4 km^2), often overlap to a large extent, and include multiple den sites (Rathbun & Cowley 2008, Tromp 2011). There is evidence to suggest that females occasionally forage in pairs for two to three consecutive days before resuming their solitary lifestyle (S Rapson unpublished data).

Primarily diurnal, the foraging behaviour of these mongooses in Namibia indicates that they are highly opportunistic (Rathbun *et al.* 2005). Prey items include insects, scorpions and solifuges, small mammals, birds, lizards and snakes (Rathbun & Cowley 2008, Nakwaya 2009, Warren *et al*. 2009), suggesting a very catholic diet.

THREATS

There are no known major threats.

High levels of hybridisation can occur with its sister species (slender mongoose, *H. sanguineus*) as documented at Spitzkoppe and Ruacana (Rapson *et al*. 2012). Unusually large populations of slender mongoose may be found in these areas due to local communities unintentionally providing food scraps and chickens. Thus, there is an increased probability of close contact between the two species of mongoose (Rapson *et al*. 2012).

In addition, dog predation and the trapping of mongooses by local communities who consider them a pest have

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the potential to pose a significant threat to this species. Indeed, the encroachment of local communities with dogs and livestock has led to the disappearance of the black mongoose from several areas in northern Namibia (Tromp 2011).

CONSERVATION STATUS

The black mongoose is listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List (Rapson & Rathbun 2015) and has been so since its first assessment in 1996. The species is not included in the CITES Appendices.

ACTIONS

An educational programme targeting communities in the north of the country could help to reduce the persecution of this species as well as that of other mongooses. Education of farmers and communities in the uniqueness of this species – as Namibia's largest endemic carnivore – and assistance with the adoption of effective waste disposal methods and secure confinement of chickens could potentially reduce both the mortality rate of black mongooses (due to the trapping of those considered pests) and the potential for hybridisation with the slender mongoose.

There is a need to address speculation about the genetic similarity of the Namibian *G. nigrata* and the Angolan *H. flavescens* populations. This speculation arises from both populations having similar habitat preferences and behaviours despite the differences in pelage colouration on either side of the Kunene River, which could indeed be a significant geographical barrier to dispersal. Acquisition of sufficient genetic data from the Angolan *H. flavescens* population would allow us to address any uncertainty as to its taxonomic classification in relation to what is recognised as *Galerella nigrata* in Namibia.

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