

Water Mongoose *Atilax paludinosus*



© D Keats

Namibian conservation status	Least Concern
Global IUCN status	Least Concern
Namibian range	Confined to the perennial rivers in the north-east, and the Kunene and Orange Rivers
Global range	Widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, but largely absent from Namibia, Botswana and the Karoo in South Africa
Population estimate	Unknown
Population trend	Thought to be declining internationally. Unknown in Namibia
Habitat	Perennial rivers and marshes
Threats	Wetland degradation

IDENTIFYING FEATURES

This is a fairly large mongoose that weighs between 3 and 5 kg and is unlikely to be mistaken for any other small mammal in wetland habitat. It varies in colour from reddish brown to black, and has a shaggy appearance with a distinctly tapered tail.

Water mongooses are generally solitary and crepuscular to nocturnal so are not often seen, but their presence is revealed from scats and other signs close to water. The scats are filled with crushed crab shells, but also contain fur from rodent prey (not eaten by otters) (Smithers 1983). Dry carapaces of crabs discarded on the river banks are a sure sign of their presence (Smithers 1983, Apps 2000). The toes are long and without webs; when walking on mud the digits tend to splay, making the tracks, with claw marks, easily separable from those of African clawless otter, which show just the five pads on each foot. Spotted-necked otter tracks show the webs between their clawed toes (Shortridge 1934, Smithers 1983).

DISTRIBUTION

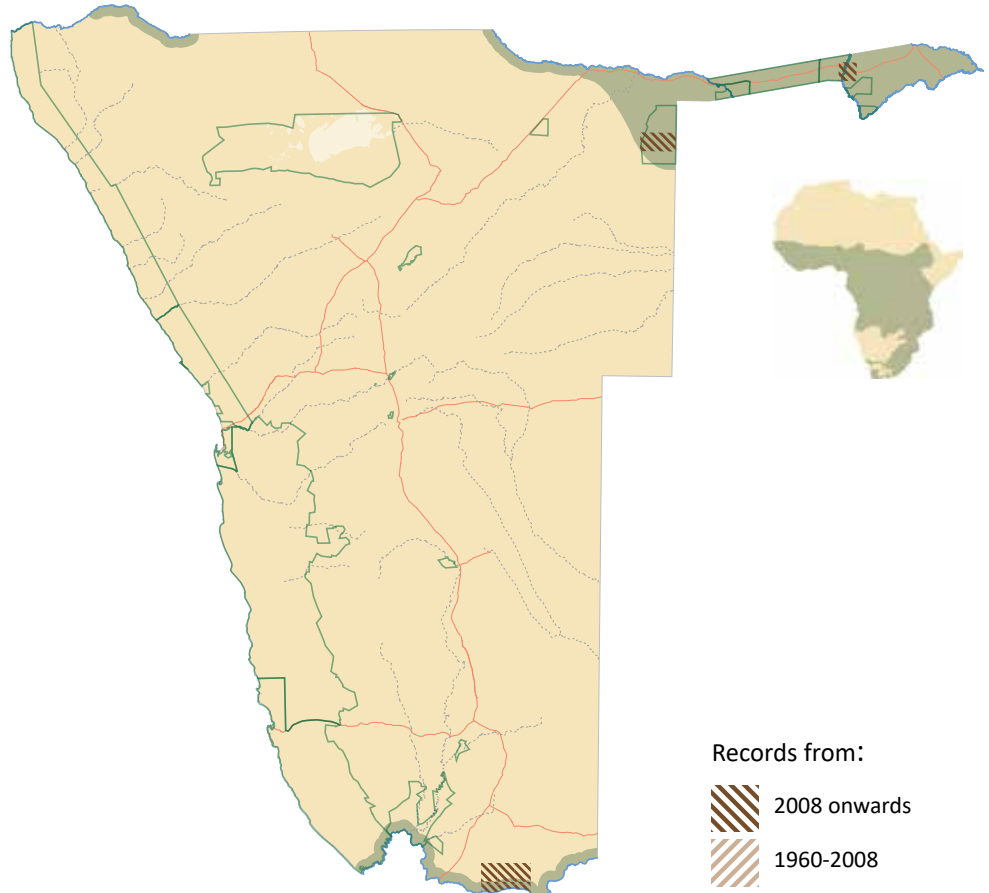
The water mongoose (also known as marsh mongoose) is widespread in sub-Saharan Africa, occurring in swamp or marsh habitats near freshwater bodies or coastal estuarine areas. It is absent from the dry south-western regions, including most of Namibia, Botswana and the Karoo in South Africa (Do Linh San *et al.* 2015a). Although semi-aquatic, it has a wide dietary niche that includes terrestrial species like small mammals and birds (Avenant & Nel 1997), and therefore occupies a broader dietary niche than the African clawless otter and spotted-necked otter.

In Namibia, it is known only from around the Kunene, Kavango and Zambezi River systems in the north, and the Orange River in the south. Hines (1993) recorded it in Khaudum National Park during seasonal flooding that created temporary wetlands along drainage lines linked to the Okavango River.

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

Inset: African distribution of water mongoose according to IUCN (Do Linh San *et al.* 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

There are insufficient data for this species to make a population estimate or to detect any trend in Namibia. They are thought to be declining globally (Do Linh San *et al.* 2015a).

ECOLOGY

The species is crepuscular and nocturnal, usually seen singly or in pairs (Louw & Nel 1986, Rowe-Rowe & Somers 1998). They are territorial, although their home ranges overlap slightly; males have smaller home ranges than females (Louw & Nel 1986, Skinner & Chimimba 2005).

Usually associated with well-watered areas along rivers and streams, and around dams where there are reeds or other thick vegetation cover (Baker & Ray 2013). May also be found along ephemeral rivers where there are pools and cover (Hines 1993), and sometimes ventures into open veld in the vicinity of water. Feeds on frogs, crabs, rodents, invertebrates and fish, and takes more terrestrial food when aquatic sources dry up or in habitats with less aquatic prey (Avenant & Nel 1997, Rowe-Rowe & Somers 1998). Tends to feed along banks and in shallow water where frogs and crabs are to be found, following regular pathways along the muddy

fringes of water courses, and swimming when necessary (Rowe-Rowe & Somers 1998).

THREATS

Degradation of riverbank vegetation due to clearing and burning of reed beds, and overgrazing and trampling of riverside vegetation by livestock, are common impacts of growing human pressure on Namibia's north-eastern wetlands. These are likely to reduce the suitable habitat for water mongoose. The presence of fishing nets along riverbanks, especially the growing problem of discarded "sefa-sefa" monofilament nets, may entangle and trap individuals, thereby increasing mortality through drowning or starvation. While it is common in bushmeat markets in Nigeria, there is no evidence for bushmeat hunting of this species in Namibia (Angelici *et al.* 1999).

CONSERVATION STATUS

This species is considered Least Concern in the latest global IUCN assessment (Do Linh San *et al.* 2015a). Although the species is peripheral in Namibia, we see no reason to change the status for the country and therefore designate it as Least Concern.



ACTIONS

Protection of wetland habitats in north-eastern Namibia is the most important conservation action for this species. This includes regulating agricultural practices and maintaining natural habitat along vegetated stretches of riverbank and swamps. The Namibian government's decision to ban monofilament fishing nets (Government Gazette December 2016, No. 296) should help reduce the problem of animals being entangled in these nets. Further research is needed to determine if the species is hunted for bushmeat in Namibia.



Assessors: John Pallett and Gail Thomson
Reviewer: Peter Apps

Suggested citation: Pallett J & Thomson G 2022. A conservation assessment of Water Mongoose *Atilax paludinosus*. In: NCE, LCMAN, MEFT (eds) 2022. Conservation Status and Red List of the Terrestrial Carnivores of Namibia. Pp 143-145. MEFT, LCMAN & NCE, Windhoek, Namibia