THE GENETS AND MONGOOSES OF THE O.F.S.

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The civets, genets, and mongooses all belong to the Order Carnivora and Family Viverridae. The extinct Family Miacidae which existed during the Eocene, i.e. 55 million years ago, probably formed the ancestral stock to all modern Carnivora and so closely do these fossils resemble the viverrids that some authorities have suggested that the viverrids are nothing more than advanced miacids.

The African viverrids are divided into three subfamilies: Nandiniinae - palm civet, Viverrinae - civets and genets, and Herpestinae - mongooses. While 18 genera and many more species of viverrids are found in Africa only six genera and eight species occur in the Orange Free State. Two of these viverrids, the yellow mongoose *Cynictis penicillata* and suricate *Suricata suricatta* are endemic to the southern parts of Africa i.e. they do not occur elsewhere in Africa.

Viverrids can, depending on the species, be nocturnal or diurnal, gregarious or solitary, terrestrial, semi-aquatic or arboreal. Olfactorial communication is important in viverrids and is by means of well developed perineal or anal scent glands. The secretions of these are so copious and durable in the civet that they are used in the perfume trade as a valuable fixative of flower scents. Peculiar stories concerning these anal scent glands are also told.

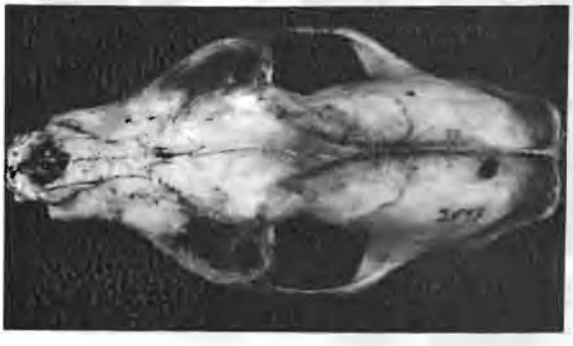
The water mongoose, *Atilax paludinosus* occasionally sun-bathes, lying on its back, thus exposing its prominent hairless pale-pink anal area which contrasts against the surrounding fringe of dark hair. This display is claimed to induce birds and fowl to approach and peck at the anus, whereupon the mongoose seizes the bird.

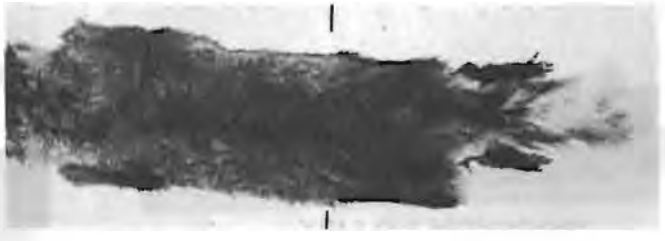
The white-tailed mongoose, *Ichneumia albicauda*, is alleged to have the urge to chase its anal gland occasionally and put its nose under its own tail This "unusual" behaviour attracts birds and one mongoose was seen killing four guineafowl after adopting such contortions, rearing up and falling from side to side.

Similar unorthodox tactics are also occasionally used by canid and mustelid species *viz.* some foxes, *Vulpes* spp. adopt a "dead" posture to catch ravens which alight near the "carcass" to scavenge, the White-naped weasel, *Poecilogale albinucha* and Striped polecat, *Ictonyx striatus* occasionally have the habit of lying limp and shamming death when threatened.

Therefore in view of these "similar" behaviours which are found in the above species, albeit that the motives may not always be the same and that these behaviours do no appear to be routine, the question might be asked whether the outlandish story of the water mongoose luring its prey with its anal glands, is perhaps so absurd. It is also frequently told that the water mongoose (kommetjiesgatmuishond) places a mealie-pip on its anal region whilst lying on its back to lure fowls. This story does, however, seem far-fetched.

The various viverrids which occur in the O.F.S. can easily be identified according to their pelage colour. However, should only a skull be available a key can, in conjunction with photographs of these skulls, be used. Note that the Viverridae never have less than 36 teeth.





WHITE-TAILED MONGOOSE

Witstertmuishond *Ichneumia albicauda*

Food: Rodents, insects, crabs and frogs.

Habitat: Well-watered areas having long grassveld and shrubs. Occurs mainly in the north-eastern O.F.S.

Habits: Nocturnal, occurs singly or in pairs. Lives in aardvark burrows, and holes mady by other animals.

Total length: 1 000 mm
Mass: 4,2 kg

WATER MONGOOSE

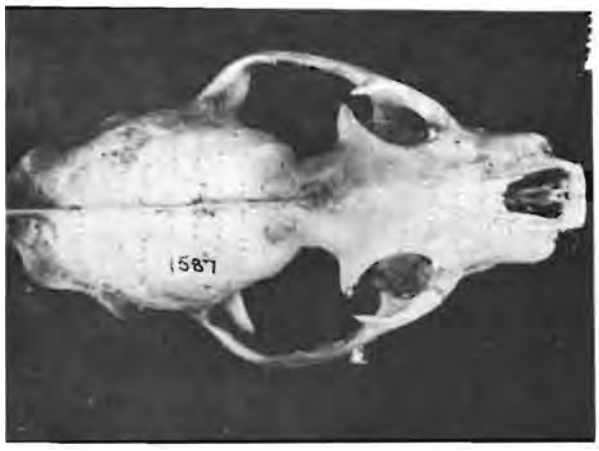
(Kommetjiesgatmuishond) *(Atilax paludinosus)*

Food: Frogs, crabs and rodents.

Habits: Nocturnal, occurs singly, and semi-aquatic.

Habitat: Rocky crevices and reed beds near rivers, streams and vleis. Occurs throughout the O.F.S.

Total length: 900 mm
Mass: 3 kg



SURICATE

(Stokstertmeerkat) *(Suricata suricatta)*

Food: Insects, mainly beetles and caterpillars.

Habits: Diurnal, gregarious and occurs in packs of up to 30. Digs its own burrows and is often found in association with yellow mongoose and ground squirrels.

Habitat: Semi-arid to arid veld. More abundant in the western O.F.S.

Total length: 500 mm
Mass: 700 g

SLENDER MONGOOSE

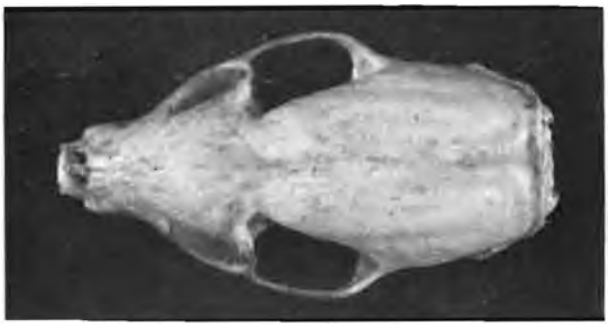
(Rooimuishond) *(Herpestes sanguineus)*

Food: Rodents and insects.

Habitat: Well-watered areas with trees and shrubs or arid and semi-arid regions. Occurs mainly in the western O.F.S.

Habits: Diurnal, occurs singly or in pairs. Lives in old termite mounds and in holes made by other animals.

Total length: 550 mm
Mass: 450g



CAPE GREY MONGOOSE

(Kleingrysmuishond) *(Herpestes pulverulentus)*

Food: Rodents and insects.

Habitat: Rocky koppies. Confined to the central and southern O.F.S.

Habits. Diurnal, occurs singly or in pairs. Lives in rock crevices and holes made by other animals.

Total length: 650 mm
Mass: 900 g

SMALL-SPOTTED GENET

(Kleinkolmuskeljaatkat) *(Genetta genetta)*

Food: Mainly rodents.

Habitat: Terrestrial, and arboreal in wooded areas. Occurs throughout the O.F.S.

Habits: Nocturnal, occurs singly or in pairs. Lives in hollow logs, and old termite mounds.

Total length: 950 mm
Mass: 1,5 kg

YELLOW MONGOOSE

(Rooimeerkat) *(Cynictis penicillata)*

Food: Insects, mainly termites.

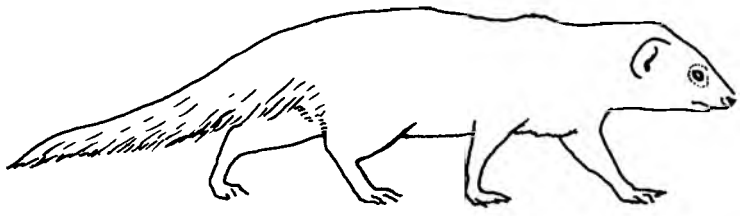
Habitat: Semi-arid to arid veld, also in scrub areas. Abundant throughout the O.F.S.

Habits: Diurnal and crepuscular occurs singly or in family groups. Digs its own burrows and is often found in association with suricates and ground squirrels.

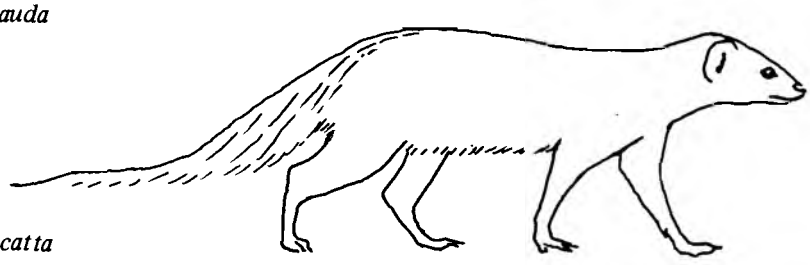
Total length: 600 mm
Mass: 900 g

1. Skull length greater than 100 mm 2
   Skull length less than 100 mm 3

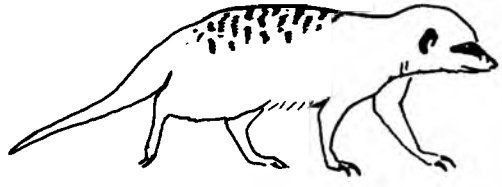
2. 36 teeth ($=\frac{3.1.4.2}{3.1.3.2}$) . . . . . *Atilax paludinosus*



   40 teeth ($=\frac{3.1.4.2}{3.1.4.2}$) . . . . . *Ichneumia albicauda*

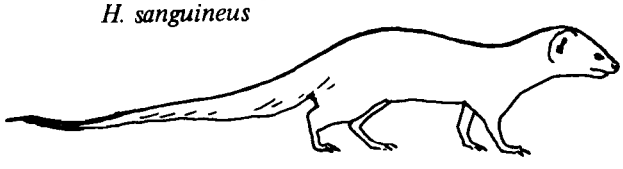


3. 36 teeth ($=\frac{3.1.3.2}{3.1.3.2}$) . . . . . *Suricata suricatta*



   38 teeth ($=\frac{3.1.3.2}{3.1.3.2}$) . . . . . *Herpestes* spp.

H. sanguineus



H. pulverulentus

   40 teeth ($=\frac{3.1.4.2}{3.1.4.2}$) 4

4. Skull length greater than 80 mm . . . . . *Genetta genetta*

   Skull length less than 80 mm . *Cynictis penicillata*