

THE LARGE-SPOTTED GENET

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Large-spotted genet.

These nocturnal, tree-inhabiting, cat-like animals (although only distantly related to the cats), have confused scientists for many years — two hundred and twenty-six years have elapsed since the first genet was described in 1758 and still scientists agree that there is a need for a detailed study of this group. The main concern, primarily because of the large variation in colour and size, is to determine how many kinds of genets exist.

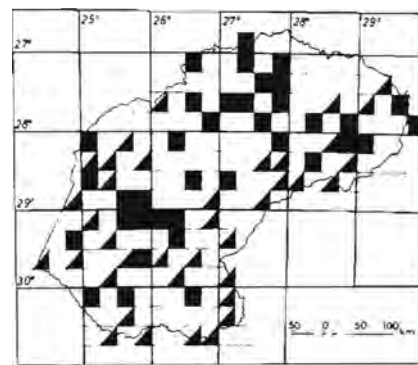
Small-spotted genets are common in the Orange Free State and occur throughout the province. They are also found in many other parts of southern Africa although they occur marginally in Natal. They are also distributed in the northern parts of Africa up to the Red Sea and even range into France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Palestine and Arabia.

By contrast, Large-spotted genets have a restricted distribution in the Orange Free State. Past records indicate that they have only been recorded at one locality in the province namely in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park. However, recently a Large-spotted genet (as well as a Small-spotted genet) was collected on the farm Summerslie in the Harrismith district. Elsewhere the Large-spotted genet (as recognized here) is also not widely distributed and only occurs in the Cape Province (southwestern, southern and eastern regions), Natal and western Lesotho.

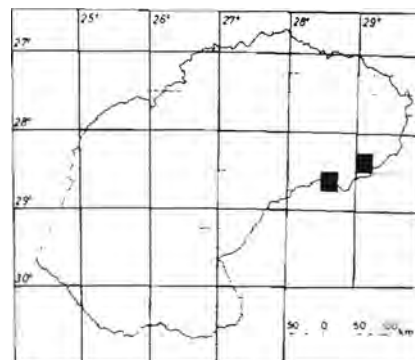
The main external differences between the two species found in the Orange Free State are:
 Smaller black spots; ground colour whitish; tip or last hairs of tail usually white
 Small spotted genet, *Genetta genetta*

Larger predominantly black spots; ground colour yellowish; tip of tail black
 Large-spotted genet, *Genetta tigrina*.

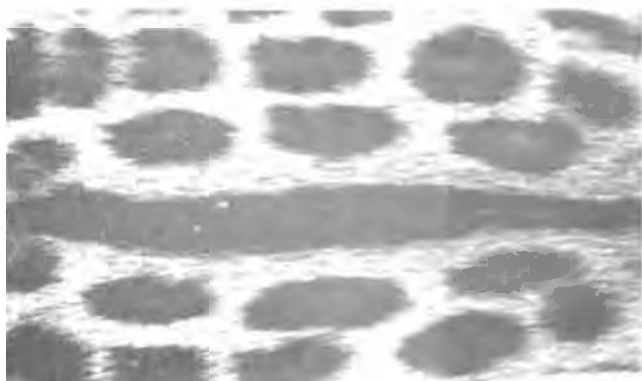
Note that the distributional range of the Large-spotted genet (and most of the other *c.* ten species which occur elsewhere in northern Africa) has not yet been fully established. One reason is the uncertainty about the exact number of genet species in existence. For example, some authorities consider a third species, the Rusty-



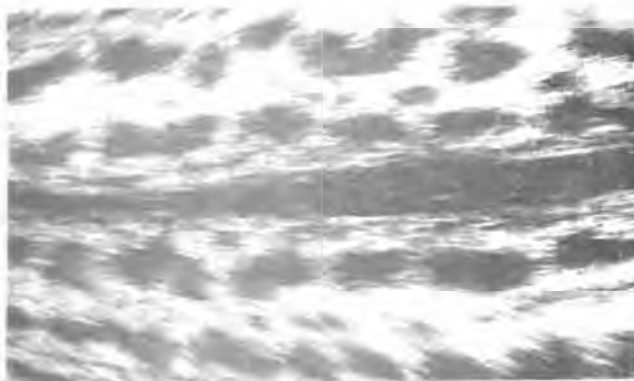
Localities in the Orange Free State where Small-spotted genet have been collected/observed.



Localities in the Orange Free State where Large-spotted genet have been collected



Spots of the Large-spotted genet



Spots of the Small-spotted genet

spotted genet, *Genetta rubiginosa*, also to occur in South Africa (*viz.* northern Cape, Transvaal and Zululand) and elsewhere in Africa while others regard this "species" merely as a form (subspecies) of the Large-spotted genet, *Genetta tigrina*.

Variation (individual and geographical) in the amount of spotting and shade of pelage colour, body dimensions and skull differences sometimes found within the different kinds makes the classification (taxonomy) of the genus extremely difficult.

This is therefore one of the reasons why research institutions, such as museums, collect animals so that ultimately adequate samples will be available to solve taxonomic problems such as these

Only after an animal's name and its distribution have been defined can related research, such as epidemiological studies of disease, ecology, etc., be undertaken and the status of a species be adequately assessed and the necessary conservation and management measures taken

