

Further notes on Javan Ferret Badger *Melogale orientalis* at Gunung Gede Pangrango National Park, Java

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Abstract

Little has been published on the ecology or conservation status of the Javan Ferret Badger *Melogale orientalis*. Confiding individuals were found scavenging at each of several picnic-sites checked along the tourist trails of Gunung Gede Pangrango National Park on the night of 8–9 June 2008. This seems to be an established pattern of behaviour at this well-protected site. Clarification of the species's overall conservation status requires observations from other areas.

Keywords: altitudinal distribution, conservation status, habituation, protected area tourism, scavenging

Catatan tambahan tentang Teledu Jawa *Melogale orientalis* di Taman Nasional Gunung Gede, Jawa

Abstrak

Masih sangat sedikit publikasi tentang status ekologi atau konservasi dari satwa Teledu Jawa *Melogale orientalis*. Beberapa ekor deluk ditemukan sedang mencari makan di beberapa tempat piknik di sepanjang jalur wisata di Taman Nasional Gunung Gede Pangrango pada tanggal 8–9 Juni 2008. Cara seperti ini tampaknya sudah menjadi pola perilaku tetap di kawasan konservasi ini. Klarifikasi dari status konservasi secara menyeluruh dari jenis ini masih memerlukan pengamatan di tempat-tempat lain.

Kata kunci: distribusi ketinggian, status konservasi, habituasi, pariwisata kawasan lindung, mencari mangsa

The Javan Ferret Badger *Melogale orientalis* (cover photograph of this issue), endemic to the islands of Java and Bali (Indonesia), seems never to have been studied in depth in the field. Of the three congeners, only Small-toothed Ferret Badger *M. moschata* has been the focus of ecological research (Wang & Fuller 2003, Zhou *et al.* 2008 and references therein). Published information relates mostly to incidental specimen records and a few sightings, and Riffel (1991) considered the species “virtually unknown with respect to ecology and conservation status”. Since then, Suyanto (2003) reported that one was trapped at Gunung Halimun National Park during a 1990s rodent survey and considered it to be “rare” there, but during a camera-trapping survey in the Cikaniki area of that park, using cameras baited with chickens, five ferret badgers were photographed during November–December 1997, making them the third most frequently photographed mammal (Yoneda *et al.* 1998a). In December 1997, one was radio-collared there, but was only followed for two days (Yoneda *et al.* 1998b). Brickle (2007) presented two sightings of ferret badgers from Gunung Gede Pangrango National Park, Java, in 2006. He has subsequently seen the species there 2–3 further times and heard regularly of other people doing so. Sightings are usually of animals scavenging around the several camping and picnic spots along the park's trail network.

We went specifically to look for badgers at Gunung Gede on the night of 8–9 June 2008. To maximise chances of seeing them (and other carnivores), tinned fish was taken for bait. Towards dusk we separated and sat at two picnic sites, one either side of the hot springs (6°45'42"S, 106°58'59"E; 2,000 m altitude). From 20h15 to 03h05 we worked our way down the main tourist path, spotlighting for mammals, back to the entrance (1,360 m), pausing for half-an-hour (around midnight) at the trail fork (1,600 m; where the summit and hot spring path separates from the waterfall

path) and where the remainder of the fish was spread out. The distance covered was 3¾ km, and the trail runs almost entirely through primary montane forest.

Ferret badgers appeared at both dusk-watch sites, one at one site and three at the other. At both, the animals first appeared shortly after dark, around 18h15, and made repeated forays from the surrounding undergrowth into the picnic-site. They foraged by rooting through the leaf litter, leaving bare areas where almost all leaves had been case aside. They showed little interest in the fish bait, although some was eaten at both sites. They were unconcerned by human presence, approaching within 15 cm of us; they sometimes seemed somewhat discomforted by the very bright (500,000 cp) illumination. At the site with three animals, the badgers, despite being close to each other, were not obviously interacting, but gave an appearance of indifferent proximity. They entered and left the picnic area singly or as two together. The age/sex make up and relationship of these three animals could not be determined; one seemed smaller than the other two. Wang & Fuller (2003) found extensive overlap of home range both within and between sexes in Small-toothed Ferret Badger, and it seems that this may also occur in Javan Ferret Badger. At the trail-fork, a single ferret badger was observed making repeated short visits into the picnic area, with no special interest in the fish (although it did feed eagerly at a pile of boiled rice), and showing little or no concern at our presence. The only carnivore seen while we walked down the trail was a further single ferret badger just after we left the entrance gate, apparently foraging along a stream bank. All the animals were entirely on the floor, despite an abundance of walls, trees and other objects on which to climb (some of which would surely hold picnic rubbish from time to time).

Observing six ferret badgers at four sites spread along this trail, over the entire altitudinal range covered (1,360–2,000 m),

suggests a healthy population. That scavenging animals were seen at all three picnic sites investigated indicates that this is common behaviour at Gunung Gede. Moreover, shortly before our visit, round dusk on 27 May 2008, a group led by Ganda Wahyutama (*in litt.* 2008) saw five ferret badgers at yet another picnic site just above the hot spring site (2,230 m altitude) in two groups, apparently consisting of an adult and juvenile in one group, and an adult and two juveniles in another group (this issue, front cover photograph). One of these juvenile badgers took dry biscuits directly from the observers' hands. Such habituation is not unexpected, because Small-toothed Ferret Badgers also live in close proximity to people (Wang & Fuller 2003).

It is not wise to extrapolate from ferret badger status at Gunung Gede to Java as a whole, because the site is rather atypical. It is the principal outdoor recreation area for Jakarta and Bogor, receiving approximately 50,000–100,000 visitors per year, with as many as 1,000 people a day passing through these picnic grounds on peak weekends. The surplus food left by visitors makes easy foraging for the ferret badgers, and in other ways visitors are benign from a small carnivore perspective: they hike, camp, picnic, play music and so on, but any form of hunting or even active molestation of animals is exceptionally rare. Dogs are not allowed in the park. Habitat extent and condition is stable within the national park's 150 km². Gunung Gede has been like this for decades, giving plenty of time for animals to adapt to an environment of negligible threat. However, while ferret badgers appear secure in Gunung Gede, a species-level conservation assessment requires data from sites spread across the island and more representative in terms of human pressures.

Brickle (2007) referred to Sunda Stink-badgers *Mydaus javanensis* also scavenging regularly from visitors along Gunung Gede's trails. A review of the information on which this was based, primarily unpublished birdwatchers' trip reports, suggests that this identification should be considered unproven, as there appears to be some confusion in visitors' minds between the two badger species. However, this stink-badger is known from Gunung Gede, e.g. one was seen by spotlight shortly after dusk on 8 July 1989 by Wilkinson *et al.* (1991).

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