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New records of Libyan Striped Weasel *Ictonyx libycus* and Common Genet Genetta *genetta* from the Algerian Sahara

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Abstract

This note details new records for Libyan Striped Weasel *Ictonyx libycus* and Common Genet *Genetta genetta* in the Algerian Sahara. A Libyan Striped Weasel was captured about 30 km from In Guezzam (19°34'N, 5°46'E), in Tamanrasset province, and was identified at the Ahaggar Cultural Park before being released. A Common Genet was camera-trapped in a natural wetland at Hamada du Draa (28°51'N, 8°15'W), in Tindouf province. These records confirm the presence of these species further south in Algeria than they have previously been described.

Keywords: desert, Mustelidae, North Africa, oasis, Viverridae, wetland

Algeria's mammalian fauna currently covers 111 species spread over 37 families (Ahmim 2019). Little information is available on the distribution and population status of the country's small carnivores (De Smet 1989).

The Common Genet *Genetta genetta* is widespread in North Africa and sub-Saharan regions (Gaubert et al. 2015; Fig. 1b). It is common in Morocco (Cuzin 1996, Aulagnier et al. 2017) and Algeria (De Smet 1989, Hamdine et al. 1993, Khidas 1998). Ahmim (2019) reported its presence in northern Algeria (Jijel, Béjaia, Skikda, Mila, Khenchela, Guelma, Boumerdes, Tlemcen, Djurdjura and Ain Timouchent) and in the country's highlands (El Bayadh, Laghouat and Tiaret). In Algeria, the Common Genet's southernmost records do not go beyond the Saharan Atlas limit (Laghouat province).

The Libyan Striped Weasel *Ictonyx libycus* is found in North Africa (Ahmim & Do Linh San 2015; Fig. 1c). In Tunisia, the range of the species has been updated on the basis of new photographic records in four localities where it had not been previously recorded (El Farhati & Nouira 2022). Its distribution is poorly known and it apparently overlaps with Striped Polecat *Ictonyx striatus* in parts of the Sahel (Ahmim & Do Linh San 2015). A male specimen of Libyan Striped Weasel in the Natural History Museum of Paris, France, was collected in the Algerian Sahara, but the exact locality was apparently not recorded (Loche 1858). In Algeria, this species has been reported in several localities of the northern provinces (Oran, Mascara, Mazafran, Souk Ahras, Mostaganem, Tlemcen, Sidi Bel-Abbès, Tiaret, Batna and Biskra) and in the Atlas Mountains, as well as in the

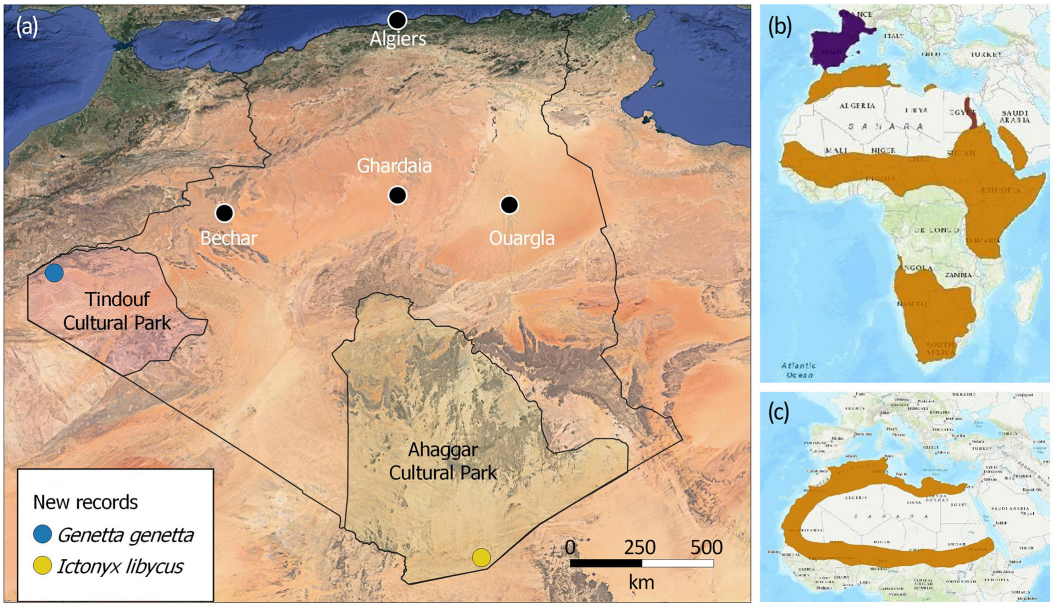

Fig. 1. (a) Location of the records, reported herein, of Common Genet *Genetta genetta* (blue dot) and Libyan Striped Weasel *Ictonyx libycus* (yellow dot) in the Algerian Sahara. The previously known ranges of each species, as reported by the IUCN, are (b) *Genetta genetta* (Gaubert et al. 2015) and (c) *Ictonyx libycus* (Ahmim & Do Linh San 2015).

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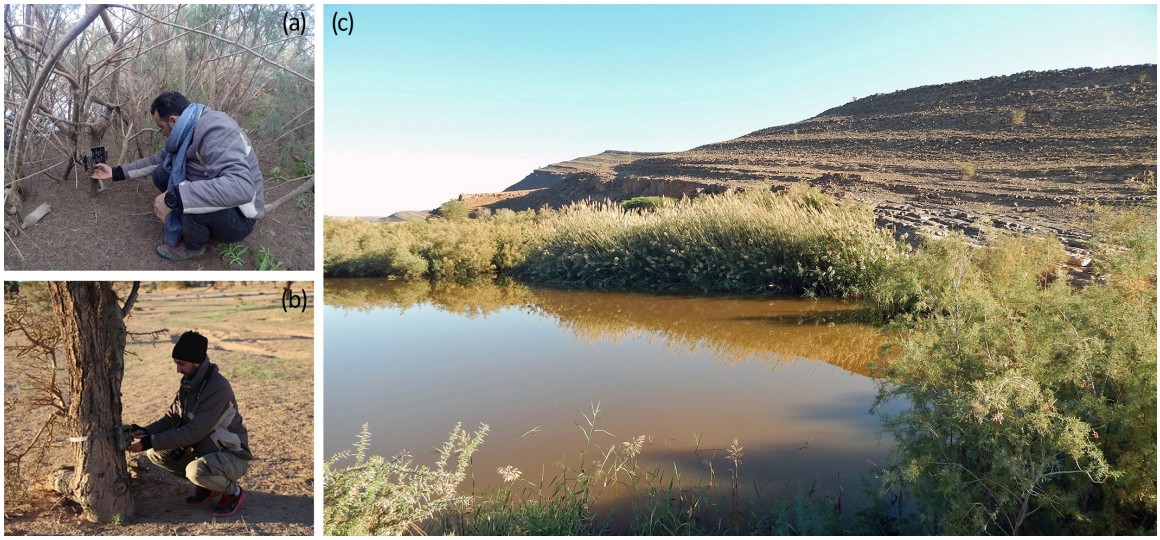

Fig. 2. Images of Tindouf Cultural Park, Algeria, in November 2018, where a Common Genet *Genetta genetta* was camera-trapped. (a) Camera-trap installed 2 m from the wetland, at a site dominated by French tamarisk *Tamarix gallica*. (b) Camera-trap set up 100 m from the wetland, at a site dominated by Umbrella Thorn *Vachellia tortilis*. (Photos: Mohamed Boussekine.) (c) The wetland at Tafegoumt. (Photo: Abdenour Moussouni.)

highlands (Laghouat, Boussaâda, Djelfa, Boughezoul, Aïn Sefra, Mergueb and Aïn Ouessara). Other reports of the species are sites in the region that is locally referred to as the Sahara's Gates (Béchar, Ghardaïa, Erg Oriental, Erg Occidental and Oued Righ; Ahmim 2019). Note that erg is a desert landform comprising sand with little or no vegetative cover. The southernmost records are located in the areas of Ghardaia, Béchar and Ouargla in the Sahara's Gates but not in the extreme southern part of the Algerian Sahara.

In this note, we describe new locality records for Libyan Striped Weasel and Common Genet in Algeria. The records confirm the presence of these species outside their previously described range, namely in the extreme south of the Algerian Sahara.

The two sites surveyed were the Tindouf Cultural Park, in Algeria's far west, and the Ahaggar Cultural Park, in the southernmost part of the country (Fig. 1a). These two parks fall within the Saharan bioclimatic zone.

Fig. 3. One of several camera-trap photographs of a Common Genet *Genetta genetta* in Tafegoumt wetland, Hamada du Draa, Tindouf province, Algeria, taken on 23 November 2018. This particular image was taken at 00h56.

Transect surveys and camera-trapping were used for collecting information on small carnivores in these areas, as part of the wildlife monitoring programmes implemented by staff of the two parks. Camera-traps (Bushnell Trophy Cam HD Aggressor) were positioned in different environments (Fig. 2) following opportunistic sampling techniques (Rovero & Zimmermann 2016). Camera-traps were left for an average of 24 hours and then removed. Camera-trap stations were set up where there were water sources, suitable habitat (vegetation cover) and/or any signs that pointed to the presence of mammals, such as tracks and faeces.

A camera-trap placed in Tafegoumt wetland, in the Hamada du Draa (Tindouf province), early in the morning of 22 November 2018, recorded a Common Genet (Fig. 3) at 00h56 on 23 November. Local people testified that this species had been observed at the same locality in 2021 (I. S. Zribiaa & M. Boussekine, pers. comm.).

In June 2020, during routine field surveys by staff of the Ahaggar Cultural Park, a Libyan Striped Weasel was captured about 30 km from In Guezzam (19°34'N, 5°46'E; Fig. 4). The habitat was characterised by steppe-like vegetation, dominated by the shrus *Cornulaca monacantha* and the herb *Psoralea plicata*. Not having seen a Libyan Striped Weasel before, the park staff took the animal to park headquarters in Tamanrasset because they wanted to confirm the animal identification. After identification, the individual was released at the same location where it was captured.

The Common Genet avoids arid and semi-arid areas (De Smet & Hamdine 1988). The record from a humid vegetated habitat within an arid zone supports

Fig. 4. The Libyan Striped Weasel *Ictonyx libycus*, captured in Guezzam, in June 2020, photographed in the pick-up truck of park staff. (Photo: Hamoud Amerzagh.)

statements made by Cuzin (2003), who suggested that, in the Saharan environment, this generalist small carnivore can find enough resources only close to prey-productive oases. The Tafegoumt wetland (Fig. 2), characterised by a permanent watercourse, dense riparian vegetation and rocky outcrops, offers good habitat for Common Genet.

Libyan Striped Weasel has been recorded in dry sandy or stony environments (Stuart & Stuart 2016), such as desert rims, mountains and oases, and sub-desert regions (Cuzin 2013). The species is also considered one of the most typical mammals of the erg (Sèbe et al. 2003).

Common Genet and Libyan Striped Weasel are categorised as of Least Concern in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. At the national level, both species are fully protected in accordance with the Executive Decree No. 12-235 of 3 Rajab 1433, issued on 24 May 2012. However, the application of this law is rather inconsistent. Both records were from within, or close to, cultural parks. Algeria's network of cultural parks covers the entire Saharan part of the country and have legal status as protected areas. These areas are recognised by the IUCN as Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (IUCN 2020) and contribute to the conservation of the desert wildlife species in the country.

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