

A daytime observation of a group of Masked Palm Civets *Paguma larvata* in Darjeeling, India

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Abstract

A daytime observation of two adult and four juvenile Masked Palm Civets *Paguma larvata* on a *Castanopsis tribuloides* tree was made in a village in Darjeeling, India, on 29 November 2017. Masked Palm Civets are generally reported to be nocturnal, solitary and territorial in nature, and are rarely encountered in groups, let alone during the day. This note presents details, including photographs and a video of the observation and thus adds to the limited literature on the natural history of Masked Palm Civets in the wild.

Keywords: Viverridae, small carnivore, diurnal, civet day-bed, *Castanopsis tribuloides*

At about 09h05 on 29 November 2017, while observing birds in a rural village in the Takdah cantonment in Darjeeling, India (27°2'22"N, 88°21'29"E, WGS 84; 1591 m asl), I observed six individuals of Masked Palm Civet *Paguma larvata* on a *Castanopsis tribuloides* tree. The tree was about 25 m away from the nearest house. The tree had a diameter at breast height (DBH) of 56 cm and an approximate height of 15 m.

Two of the observed civets were adults (Fig. 1), whilst four were identified as juveniles on the basis of their smaller body size, shorter limbs and playful behaviour. All of the juveniles were the same size and therefore presumably were of the same approximate age. The juveniles were seen to be fol-

lowing the two adults to the top of the tree (Fig. 1b). The two adults climbed from one branch to the next towards the top of the tree, whilst the juveniles interacted playfully with each other (see video at <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.23995086>). The juveniles could be seen frequently approaching the adults playfully, to which the adults responded with signs of parental care (Fig. 1c). Throughout the observation, the civets were silent and showed no signs of aggression to one another. I was able to observe the civets for about three minutes, after which all of the civets moved further up towards the crown of the tree (Fig. 1d), making further observation impossible. I waited in the same place for another 30 –



Fig. 1. A group of six Masked Palm Civets *Paguma larvata* observed in a *Castanopsis tribuloides* tree in the morning of 29 November 2017 in Darjeeling, India: (a) an adult; (b) two juveniles following the two adults toward the treetop; (c) an adult and a juvenile; (d) an adult looking down from the treetop before reaching its presumed day-bed. (Photos: Aditya Pradhan.)



45 minutes in the hope of getting better photographs, but the civets did not come down. This suggests that the civets were observed as they were approaching a diurnal resting place, known as a day-bed.

The current note documents an opportunistic observation of diurnally active Masked Palm Civets. Generally considered solitary, territorial and predominantly nocturnal, a diurnal observation of a group of six Masked Palm Civets could be considered an uncommon observation. However, camera-trap images and field observations of Masked Palm Civet have shown that the species can sometimes forage or travel in duos or groups (Duckworth et al. 2016) and it has been recorded during the day (Zhou et al. 2014).

Considering the observation was made in late November, it can be assumed that the juveniles were conceived during the late autumn (Lekagul & McNeely 1978), and that the adults observed could have been their parents. Given the open eyes of all the juveniles, their sizes and their ability to jump and climb to the top of the tree, it is likely that the juveniles were 6 to 8 weeks old or possibly older. Assuming that all of the observed juveniles were conceived by the same parent, and considering the recorded litter size of one to four (Torii & Miyake 1986), it can be assumed that all of the juveniles conceived by the adults survived the weaning period. Juveniles are under the greatest risk of predation or diseases during this period (for example, Narula 2021).

There is little published information on the natural history of Masked Palm Civet. This note adds to the limited literature on the species in wild.

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