

**STRIPED WEASEL** *Poecilogale albinucha***Plate 78****African Striped Weasel, White-napped Weasel**

HB ♀ 24–35cm, ♂ 27–33cm; T 13.8–21.5cm;

W ♀ 0.21–0.29kg, ♂ 0.28–0.38kg

Small weasel with a long sinuous body, very short limbs and a long tail. Fur black with a yellowish-white dorsal stripe starting at the crown; stripe splits into paired stripes that run along each side. Tail is white. **Distribution and Habitat** Sub-equatorial Africa, from S Kenya and S Uganda to coastal DR Congo, and south to S Africa. Inhabits woodland savannah, grassland, scrubland, forest (its range stops at the limits of the forested Congo Basin) and vegetated semi-arid desert, e.g. the Kalahari. Occurs in plantation, agricultural and pastoral habitats. **Feeding Ecology** Rodent specialist, hunting mainly small mice, rats and mole rats to its own size; an adult may kill 3–4 rodents a night. Also eats small reptiles, insects and eggs. Foraging mainly nocturnal, terrestrial and solitary. Forages chiefly by scent, and is well suited to entering small rodent burrows;

a powerful burrower, but has not been observed excavating prey. Rodents are killed with a nape bite and vigorous kicking by the hind legs, which may dislocate the neck; large prey is sometimes killed by a throat bite. Caches surplus kills in burrows. **Social and Spatial Behaviour** Poorly known. Assumed to be solitary; most sightings are of adult individuals or females with pups. **Reproduction and Demography** Possibly seasonal. Breeding September–April (southern Africa), with births from November. Gestation 30–33 days. Litter size 1–3. Weaning at 11 weeks (captivity). Sexual maturity at 8 months. **MORTALITY** Poorly known. Occasionally killed by domestic dogs and large owls. Rabies is recorded. **LIFESPAN** 6 years in captivity. **Status and Threats** Considered uncommon to rare, but it is inconspicuous and elusive, and there is little accurate information on its status. Killed on roads in rural areas and sought after for traditional medicinal use in S Africa. Red List LC.

**LIBYAN WEASEL** *Ictonyx libyca***Saharan Striped Polecat, North African Striped Weasel**

HB 20.7–26cm; T 11.4–18cm; W 0.2–0.6kg

Small and compact weasel with a black face, limbs and underparts. White stripes interleaved with variable black inter-stripes cover the body. Tail long and white with interspersed black hairs, and sometimes with a black tip. Fur longish with a silky appearance. Unbroken white band encircles the face, running from the forehead behind the eyes to the base of the throat; this helps distinguish it from the similar Zorilla. It has well-developed anal glands and secretes a pungent fluid when threatened. **Distribution and Habitat** N Africa, on the edges of the Sahara in the coastal band of Mediterranean N Africa from Egypt to Mauritania, and through the Sahel from Mali to Sudan. Scattered records exist across

the Sahara itself, but it is unclear if it occurs throughout. Occupies mainly sub-desert habitats such as stony desert, massifs, steppes, oases and sparsely vegetated dunes. Found close to settlements in cultivated areas. **Feeding Ecology** Poorly known. Thought to feed mainly on small desert rodents, birds, reptiles, eggs and invertebrates. Nocturnal. **Social and Spatial Behaviour** Unknown. Most records are of single adults; assumed to be solitary. **Reproduction and Demography** Poorly known. Thought to be seasonal; all records of young occur January–March. Litter size 1–3. **MORTALITY** Unknown. **LIFESPAN** 5.5 years in captivity. **Status and Threats** Status poorly known. Widely distributed and locally abundant in some coastal dune areas. Hunted in Libya and Tunisia in the belief that its body parts increase human male fertility. Red List LC.

**ZORILLA** *Ictonyx striatus***Striped Polecat**

HB 28–38cm; T 16.5–28cm; W ♀ 0.4–1.4kg,

♂ 0.7–1.5kg

Larger than similar species (Libyan and Striped Weasels), jet-black with four white stripes that unite on the crown and run the length of the body to the tail, which is white interspersed with black hairs. Face distinctively marked with a cluster of three white blotches on the forehead and on each temple. Overlaps Libyan Weasel in the Sahel. Ejects a noxious anal secretion when threatened. **Distribution and Habitat** Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, except the Sahara and Congo Basin. Occurs in a wide variety of habitats from sea level to 4000m, including wet and dry woodland savannahs, grassland, forest, dunes, wetland, montane heath, semi-desert and desert. Absent from equatorial forest and desert interiors. Readily inhabits agricultural and cultivated habitats. **Feeding Ecology** Eats mainly small rodents and insects. Also eats herptiles, birds, chicks, eggs, arachnids and other invertebrates. Largest prey includes Springhare, ground squirrels and large snakes, including venomous ones such as cobras. Occasionally kills domestic poultry. Nocturnal and terrestrial. Hunting is

solitary, but juveniles sometimes help the mother in subduing large prey such as snakes. Prey is hunted by sight and smell, with rodents and insects often killed in burrows or excavated. **Social and Spatial Behaviour** Poorly known. Adults are largely solitary. Captive males are intolerant of each other, but females with juveniles tolerate other mother-kitten families in captivity. **Reproduction and Demography** Poorly known. Reported to give birth mainly November–February in southern Africa, but lactating females are recorded February–October in E Africa. Gestation 36 days. Litter size 1–3, exceptionally to 5 (captivity, the maximum reared being 3). Weaning at around 8 weeks. Females first breed at 10 months (captivity). **MORTALITY** Poorly known. Large raptors, especially owls, are confirmed predators, and it is frequently killed by domestic dogs in rural areas. **LIFESPAN** 13.3 years in captivity. **Status and Threats** Widespread habitat generalist and common to abundant in suitable protected habitat. Roadkills, domestic dogs and persecution for poultry depredation kill significant numbers in rural areas, but probably constitute only a localized threat. Valued in traditional medicinal beliefs in some areas. Red List LC.

**STRIPED WEASEL****LIBYAN WEASEL****ZORILLA**