

NOTES

Sighting of a ring-tailed vontsira (*Galidia elegans*) in the gallery forest of Berenty Private Reserve, southeastern Madagascar

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Introduction

The ring-tailed vontsira (*Galidia elegans*) is a small carnivoran that is endemic to Madagascar. Individuals of this distinctive species have a long and slender body, rather short legs, and a thick, furry tail. *Galidia elegans* is easily recognized by its reddish brown fur and by its striped tail with 6 to 7 reddish-brown and black alternating color bands (Goodman, 2012). Head and body length varies between 30 cm to 38 cm (Albignac, 1973) and body mass is between 9.0 to 10.85 kg in males and 7.6 to 8.9 kg in females (Goodman, 2012). They resemble mongooses (Family Viverridae) by their appearance, but are placed in the Family Eupleridae, which is endemic to Madagascar. The species is wide spread on the island, and can be found in a variety of different forest formations (Goodman, 2012). One subspecies, *G. e. elegans* l. Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire, 1837, is known to occur in the eastern humid forests, ranging from near Tolagnaro in the south to mountainous regions of the Andapa Basin in the north. Local villagers have reported the occurrence of the species also in the spiny forests of southeast Madagascar (Goodman & Pidgeon, 1999).

The Berenty Private Reserve is located in extreme southeastern Madagascar about 82 km west of Tolagnaro. The local habitat consists of spiny forest and of 200 ha of gallery forest along the Mandrare River, which is dominated by tamarind trees (*Tamarindus indica*). In the gallery forest, the canopy is partially closed and reaches a height of 10-15 m. The climate in Berenty is characterized by hot and wet summers and cold winters (Jolly, 2012). Beside cats and dogs,

the introduced Indian civet (*Viverricula indica*) has been cited to occur in the reserve (Jolly, 2012).

On 07 June 2012 at around 11:00h, I noted a *Galidia elegans* (Figure 1), while conducting a behavioral experiment with a group of ring-tailed lemurs (*Lemur catta*) in the section of the Berenty Reserve near the Mandrare River. The observation took place in the gallery forest located behind the cafeteria and known as the Malaza Forest (Jolly *et al.*, 2006). Because I was videotaping the experiment, it was possible to make a short recording of the carnivoran. The animal approached from the direction of the river and walked on the ground towards a tamarind tree. Once it reached the tree, it stood briefly on its hind legs, apparently looking up the tree trunk or sniffing it. It is also possible, that the animal was scent marking the tree, as *G. elegans* are known to do this with their submandibular glands (Goodman, 2003). Afterwards the animal returned in the direction it approached. Of interest to note, the ring-tailed lemurs gave alarm calls at the appearance of the *Galidia* and continued with these vocalizations until it disappeared.

Thus, this observation and associated images confirm definitively the presence of *Galidia elegans* in the gallery forests of southern Madagascar. Moreover, it is interesting that a group of large diurnal lemurs gave alarm calls when spotting this small carnivoran. Although analysis of *G. elegans* feces has shown that it feeds on lemurs, like *Cheirogaleus major* and *Microcebus rufus* (Goodman *et al.*, 1993; Goodman, 2003), it is unlikely that *G. elegans* could harm an adult *Lemur catta*, but perhaps represents danger for their offspring.

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Figure 1. A ring-tailed vontsira (*Galidia elegans*) photographed in the Berenty Private Reserve (screenshot).

References

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