

# The Egyptian Mongoose, *Herpestes ichneumon*, in Western Egypt

by Max Kasperek

**Abstract:** The Egyptian Mongoose (*Herpestes ichneumon*) was recorded at least at two localities on the coast between Alexandria and the Libyan border in 1993. Its distribution area in Egypt thus extends further west than previously known. This is the first time that the Mongoose has been recorded in sand dunes near the sea.

**Kurzfassung:** 1993 wurden an mindestens zwei Stellen der Küste zwischen Alexandria und der Libyschen Grenze Mangusten (*Herpestes ichneumon*) festgestellt. Sie kommen damit in Ägypten wesentlich weiter westlich vor als bisher bekannt. Es ist dies das erste Mal, daß Mangusten in Sanddünen an der Meeresküste festgestellt wurden.

**Key words:** Egyptian Mongoose, zoogeography, Egypt, Middle East.

## Introduction

The Egyptian Mongoose, *Herpestes ichneumon*, was originally described from the banks of the River Nile ("ad ripas Nili") by LINNAEUS in 1758. It was subsequently found to be an uncommon inhabitant of cultivated areas of the Nile Valley and the Delta, usually near water. Outside the Nile Valley and Delta, it occurs only at El-Fayum and was recently observed at Burg El-Arab to the west of Alexandria (OSBORN & HELMY 1980). A new record in the Western Mediterranean Coastal Desert is thus remarkable in several respects.

## The records

During a survey of the nesting beaches of marine turtles in Western Egypt in June and July 1993 (see KASPAREK 1993), I visited every sandy beach between Alexandria and El-Salum on the Libyan border. On several occasions we found tracks in the sand which we thought to be Mongoose tracks. However, they were usually too old and obliterated for an unambiguous identification.

The identification of tracks as Mongoose tracks was possible to the east of Sidi Barrani on June 30, 1993. At two localities, 35 km and 20 km east of the town, we found several fresh tracks. The imprints of long fingers and claws and of the tail which is dragged enabled an unambiguous identification to be made.

We observed the tracks of the Egyptian Mongoose in white, primary sand dunes which cover a limestone ridge running parallel to the coast. The vegetation cover was sparse. The splash line of the sea was only 20 m away. There were some salt marshes to the rear of the sand dunes.

Furthermore, local people showed us a stuffed individual of the Egyptian Mongoose at Alexandria. It was said to have been killed in a village some 20 km south of the town. Another individual was observed by A. HACHENBERG and M. BRÄNDLE at the El-Fayum oasis on July 14, 1993.

## Discussion

The identification of the tracks as Mongoose tracks is beyond doubt, particularly as the imprint of a dragging tail was also observed. Other species of Mongoose and Genet were ruled out because of the distribution area.

The previous most western record of the Egyptian Mongoose in Egypt was a sighting at Burg El-Arab (OSBORN & HELMY 1980), which is some 180 km further east than the new records near Sidi Barrani. The new records form a bridge between the distribution area in the Nile Delta and at Burg el-Arab and the occurrence in Libya (OSBORN & HELMY 1980) and show that North Africa is more evenly populated than was previously thought.

All other Egyptian records of the Mongoose were made in cultivated areas near freshwater, and this is the first time that it has been found in sand dunes next to the sea. In Israel, the Egyptian Mongoose was also found in the desert (HARRISON & BATES 1991), and in southern Turkey it lives around coastal lagoons (BOSMAN & VAN DEN BERG 1988).

OSBORN & HELMY (1980) stated that the record at Burg el-Arab in 1976 may represent a recent range expansion following the completion of an irrigation canal into the desert. However, in the light of the new record, this may not be true. The Egyptian Mongoose also occurs far from this irrigation canal and far from fresh water, and there is no reason to believe that these areas were only recently colonised.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all my companions who worked with me on the sea turtle survey. The survey was carried out on behalf of MEDASSET, the Mediterranean Association to protect the Sea Turtles, and the RAC/SPA (Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas) of the Mediterranean Action Plan (UNEP, United Nations Environmental Programme) in co-operation with the National Institute of Oceanography and Fisheries Alexandria.

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