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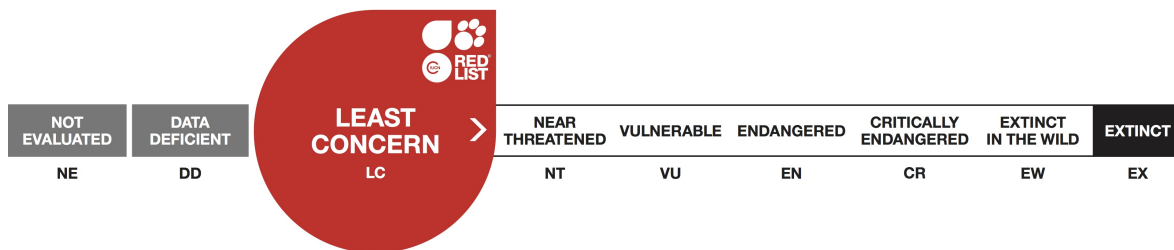
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Mellivora capensis, Honey Badger

Assessment by: Do Linh San, E., Begg, C., Begg, K. & Abramov, A.V.



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Citation: Do Linh San, E., Begg, C., Begg, K. & Abramov, A.V. 2016. *Mellivora capensis*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* 2016: e.T41629A45210107. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-1.RLTS.T41629A45210107.en>

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Taxonomy

Kingdom	Phylum	Class	Order	Family
Animalia	Chordata	Mammalia	Carnivora	Mustelidae

Taxon Name: *Mellivora capensis* (Schreber, 1776)

Synonym(s):

- *Viverra capensis* Schreber, 1776

Regional Assessments:

- [Mediterranean](#)

Common Name(s):

- English: Honey Badger, Ratel
- French: Blaireau à miel, Ratel

Taxonomic Notes:

Intraspecific taxonomy has not yet been sufficiently studied. Baryshnikov (2000) described a new subspecies from Central Asia (Turkmenistan) *Mellivora capensis buechneri* based on morphometric studies and pelage variation, and recognised a total of ten subspecies from across the entire range of the species. Wozencraft (2005) reported 12 subspecies differentiated through variations in morphometrics and coat colour. No DNA investigation of subspecies has been completed for the species, and subspecies denoted by morphometrics or pelage colour and pattern are of dubious validity. There is large variation in pelage pattern (length and size of white stripe) within populations and in size between localities within the same geographical areas (e.g., between Kalahari, a semi-arid environment, and the Zambezi valley, a mesic environment) (C. Begg and K. Begg pers. obs. 2006). Further, these differences are not necessarily related to genetic differences (C. Begg and K. Begg pers. obs. 2006). The data are often also biased by lumping sexes despite the fact that Honey Badgers are significantly sexually size dimorphic with males at least one-third larger than females (Begg 2001).

Assessment Information

Red List Category & Criteria: Least Concern [ver 3.1](#)

Year Published: 2016

Date Assessed: February 28, 2015

Justification:

Listed as Least Concern because the species has a wide distribution range, has no obvious ecological specialisations (with a wide habitat and altitudinal tolerance, and catholic diet), and there is no reason to believe it is undergoing a decline sufficient to merit listing in a threatened category or even as Near Threatened. However, clearly identifiable threats are operating, and known to be resulting in localised declines, and with the availability of additional information the species may warrant listing in a higher category of threat.

Previously Published Red List Assessments

2008 – Least Concern (LC) – <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2008.RLTS.T41629A10522766.en>

1996 – Lower Risk/least concern (LR/lc)

Geographic Range

Range Description:

The Honey Badger has an extensive range which extends through most of sub-Saharan Africa from the Western Cape, South Africa, to southern Morocco and south-western Algeria, and outside Africa through Arabia, Iran and western Asia to Middle Asia (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the Indian peninsula and Nepal. There are no collection records from Afghanistan (Hassinger 1973, Habibi 2004), but the species has been recorded on the Turkmenistan side of the cross-border Tedzhen, Murghab and Amu Darya river valleys (Sapozhenkov *et al.* 1973). Therefore it could well be present in northern Afghanistan, as already suggested by Bobrinskii *et al.* (1944). There are no records from Egypt (Basuony *et al.* 2010) or Syria (Masseti 2009). However, it is possible that Honey Badger is marginally present in the latter country, especially because the species occurs in neighbouring Jordan (Amr 2000) and Israel (Werner 2012). Historically, it is thought to be absent from the driest centre of the Sahara Desert, the Mediterranean coast as far as the Nile Valley, and the central (Free State province) part of South Africa. Although widespread in much of India, its distribution in the southern states is highly discontinuous (e.g., Gubbi *et al.* 2014) and it barely penetrates the North-east (Choudhury 2013). The few records from Iran are widely spread, although Joolaei *et al.* (2012) traced none from the country's north-west or its east. Its range in Kazakhstan is limited to the southern Mangistau region in the west of the country, notably the Ustyurt Reserve (Plakhov 2005). Some sources indicate that it occurs in Bangladesh, but there seem to be no specific records from the country (Hasan Rahman pers. comm. 2014). In Africa, they are known to range from sea level to as much as 2,600 m a.s.l. in the Moroccan High Atlas (Cuzin 2003) and 4,000 m a.s.l. in the Bale Mountains of Ethiopia (Sillero-Zubiri 1996).

Country Occurrence:

Native: Algeria; Angola (Angola); Benin; Botswana; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cameroon; Central African Republic; Chad; Congo; Congo, The Democratic Republic of the; Côte d'Ivoire; Djibouti; Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Gabon; Gambia; Ghana; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; India; Iran, Islamic Republic of; Iraq; Israel; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kenya; Kuwait; Lebanon; Liberia; Malawi; Mali; Mauritania; Morocco; Mozambique; Namibia; Nepal; Niger; Nigeria; Oman; Pakistan; Qatar; Rwanda; Saudi Arabia; Senegal; Sierra Leone; Somalia; South Africa; Sudan; Swaziland; Tanzania, United Republic of; Togo; Turkmenistan; Uganda; United Arab Emirates; Uzbekistan; Western Sahara; Yemen; Zambia; Zimbabwe

Distribution Map

Mellivora capensis

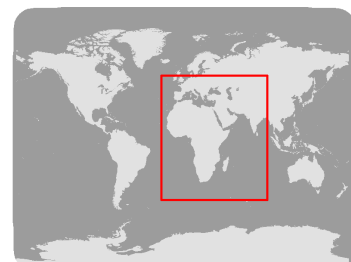


Range

Extant (resident)

Compiled by:

IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply any official endorsement, acceptance or opinion by IUCN.



Population

Honey Badgers are considered rare or to exist at low densities across most of their range (Begg *et al.* 2013). Densities based on night counts have been estimated at 0.1 individual/km² in the Serengeti N. P., Tanzania (Waser 1980) and 0.03 adult/km² in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, South Africa (Begg 2001).

Current Population Trend: Decreasing

Habitat and Ecology (see Appendix for additional information)

This species lives in a wide variety of habitat types from the dense rain forests of equatorial Africa (Bahaa-el-din *et al.* 2013, Greengrass 2013) to the miombo and mopane woodland of Eastern Africa (Bird and Mateke 2013, Fischer *et al.* 2013, White 2013) or the arid deserts on the outskirts of the Sahara and Namib. It also occurs in sand and clay deserts of Middle Asia (Heptner *et al.* 1967, Gorbunov 1995). Honey Badgers are essentially nocturnal, but may be active during the day in areas where there is little human disturbance, and during seasons when day temperatures are cooler (Begg *et al.* submitted). They are opportunistic, generalist carnivores, and feed on a range of prey items varying in size from small insect larvae to the young of ungulates (Begg *et al.* 2003a). Although they are primarily hunters of their own food, they may pirate food from other carnivores and will also scavenge from the kills of larger animals (Begg *et al.* 2013). All mammalian carnivores smaller than Honey Badgers are prey items, as are the young of medium-sized carnivores (Begg *et al.* in press). Large carnivores such as Lion (*Panthera leo*) and Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) prey on Honey Badger adults and cubs, while cubs are also killed by Black-backed Jackals (*Canis mesomelas*). Honey Badgers are primarily solitary, with a non-territorial polygynous or promiscuous mating system (Begg *et al.* 2005b). Males may range over areas as large as 500 km², and scent-marking plays an important role in communication (Begg *et al.* 2003b). Small litter size (generally one cub) and a long birth interval (Begg *et al.* 2005a), coupled with large home-range size, explains why this species generally presents low densities.

Systems: Terrestrial

Use and Trade

Their body parts (particularly paws, skin, fat and organs) are commonly used in traditional medicine because of their reputation for fearlessness and tenacity. In some areas (Zambia, Guinea), they appear in the bushmeat trade because of the decline in other more favoured bushmeat species (Colyn *et al.* 2004, Begg *et al.* 2013).

Threats (see Appendix for additional information)

Honey Badgers are used as bushmeat and in traditional medicine, but mostly they are directly persecuted (through the use of, for example, steel-jawed traps and poisons) by apiculturists and small livestock farmers throughout their range. They are also indirectly killed by non-selective control programmes targeting other species, such as jackals (*Canis* spp.) and Caracal (*Caracal caracal*; Begg *et al.* 2013). There is evidence to suggest they have gone locally extinct in many areas through poisoning (C. Begg and K. Begg pers. obs. 2006). Although there is little apiculture in areas of North Africa where the species occurs (except near the Lower Draa area, in Morocco), they are persecuted there (trapping, poisoning; K. de Smet and F. Cuzin pers. comm. 2007).

Conservation Actions (see Appendix for additional information)

Honey Badger is found in many protected areas throughout its range, including the Kgalagadi N. P., Kruger N. P., Niassa National R. and, in Kazakhstan, the Ustyurt Reserve. It is legally protected in many countries, including the Middle Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan and the Mediterranean countries of Israel, Morocco and Algeria. Commercial hive damage from Honey Badgers can be simply and effectively reduced (26% to 1%) by securing bee hives 1 m or more above the ground on a stand or trestle (Begg and Begg 2002), thereby minimising conflicts between Honey Badgers and apiculturists. The populations of Botswana and Ghana are listed on CITES Appendix III.

Credits

Assessor(s): Do Linh San, E., Begg, C., Begg, K. & Abramov, A.V.

Reviewer(s): Duckworth, J.W. & Hoffmann, M.

Contributor(s): Pacifici, M.

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Citation

Do Linh San, E., Begg, C., Begg, K. & Abramov, A.V. 2016. *Mellivora capensis*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016*: e.T41629A45210107. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-1.RLTS.T41629A45210107.en>

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Appendix

Habitats

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Habitat	Season	Suitability	Major Importance?
1. Forest -> 1.5. Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Dry	-	Suitable	-
1. Forest -> 1.6. Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Lowland	-	Suitable	-
1. Forest -> 1.9. Forest - Subtropical/Tropical Moist Montane	-	Suitable	-
2. Savanna -> 2.1. Savanna - Dry	-	Suitable	-
3. Shrubland -> 3.5. Shrubland - Subtropical/Tropical Dry	-	Suitable	-
3. Shrubland -> 3.7. Shrubland - Subtropical/Tropical High Altitude	-	Suitable	-
3. Shrubland -> 3.8. Shrubland - Mediterranean-type Shrubby Vegetation	-	Suitable	-
8. Desert -> 8.1. Desert - Hot	-	Suitable	-

Threats

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Threat	Timing	Scope	Severity	Impact Score
5. Biological resource use -> 5.1. Hunting & trapping terrestrial animals -> 5.1.1. Intentional use (species is the target)	Ongoing	-	-	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality		
5. Biological resource use -> 5.1. Hunting & trapping terrestrial animals -> 5.1.2. Unintentional effects (species is not the target)	Ongoing	-	-	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality		
5. Biological resource use -> 5.1. Hunting & trapping terrestrial animals -> 5.1.3. Persecution/control	Ongoing	-	-	-
	Stresses:	2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality		

Conservation Actions in Place

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Conservation Actions in Place
In-Place Land/Water Protection and Management
Occur in at least one PA: Yes
In-Place Education

Conservation Actions in Place
Included in international legislation: Yes
Subject to any international management/trade controls: Yes

Conservation Actions Needed

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Conservation Actions Needed
2. Land/water management -> 2.1. Site/area management
4. Education & awareness -> 4.2. Training
4. Education & awareness -> 4.3. Awareness & communications
5. Law & policy -> 5.4. Compliance and enforcement -> 5.4.2. National level
5. Law & policy -> 5.4. Compliance and enforcement -> 5.4.3. Sub-national level

Research Needed

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

Research Needed
1. Research -> 1.2. Population size, distribution & trends
3. Monitoring -> 3.1. Population trends
3. Monitoring -> 3.2. Harvest level trends

Additional Data Fields

Distribution
Lower elevation limit (m): 0
Upper elevation limit (m): 4000
Population
Population severely fragmented: No
Habitats and Ecology
Generation Length (years): 6

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