

Dwarf Mongoose *Helogale parvula*

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Namibian conservation status	Least Concern
Global IUCN status	Least Concern First assessed 1996: Least Concern, unchanged since then
Namibian range	Northern half of Namibia, from Okangwati through Etosha through to eastern tip of the Zambezi Region, with records from as far south as Okahandja
Global range	Continuous range from the horn of Africa to northern South Africa on the east, and from northern Angola to northern Namibia on the west. Centre of the range includes all of Zambia, most of Zimbabwe, and northern and western Botswana
Population estimate	Unknown
Population trend	Unknown, but probably stable
Habitat	In Namibia found in areas of savanna with termite mounds. Excluded from arid areas
Threats	No major threats

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

This is the smallest mongoose in southern Africa. Dwarf mongooses are dark brown all over the body, although they can appear black; actually they are grizzled at close distance (Apps 2000). They are notably smaller than all other mongooses, with a stocky, muscular appearance, and are usually seen with other group members, which give high-pitched peeping contact calls.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

This is a savanna species associated with dry woodland and grassland. It prefers hard or stony ground where there is vegetation cover and termite mounds which are used as refuge holes (Apps 2000).

The dwarf mongoose occurs in the northern part of Namibia,

with the southern limit approximately at the latitude of Okahandja, and extending westwards to the Opuwo area and probably to the escarpment, wherever there is adequate vegetation and rocky cover. Records are absent from far north-central Namibia, but it is known from Zambezi and the Kavango Regions.

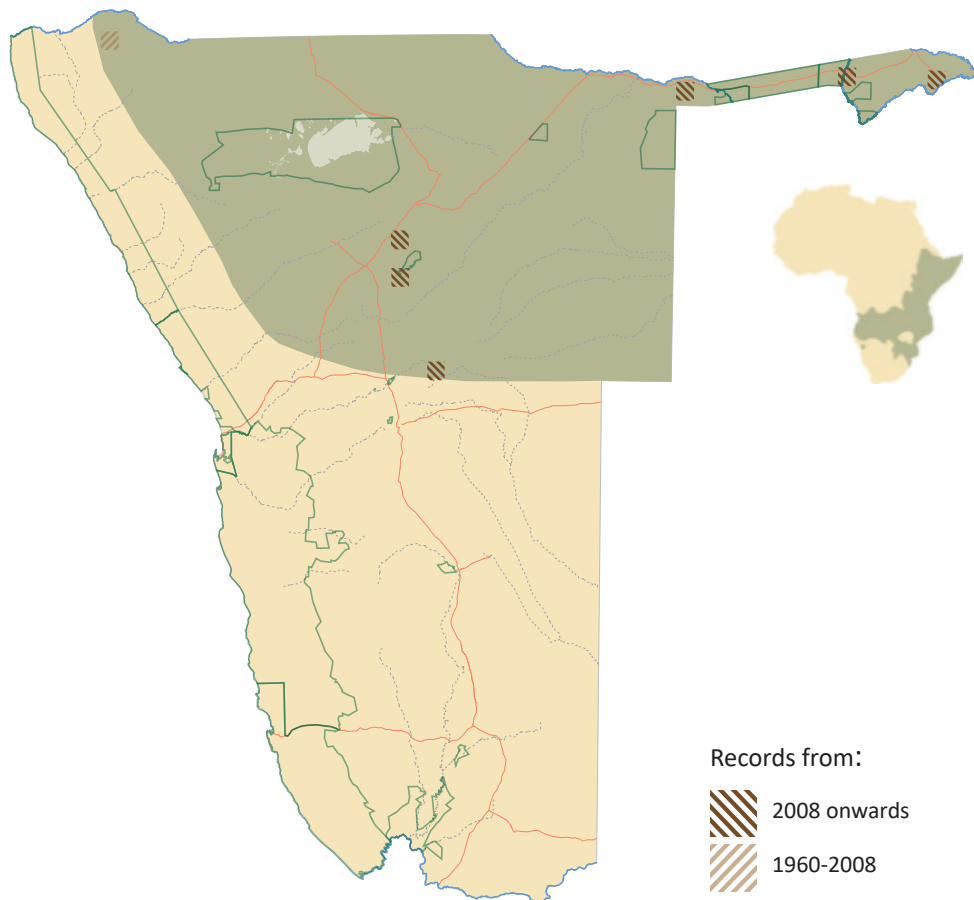
POPULATION ESTIMATE AND TREND

Population densities can be up to 31–42 individuals/km² in ideal habitats in Tanzania and South Africa (Rood 1983, Hoffmann *et al.* 2014), but 5/km² is more typical (Waser *et al.* 1995) and likely for Namibia where there are fewer den sites and less insect prey than wetter habitats. No estimate of the population in Namibia has been attempted.

Distribution records of dwarf mongoose, and present estimated area of distribution in Namibia.

Inset: African distribution of dwarf mongoose according to IUCN (Sharpe *et al.* 2015).

The Namibian distribution in the main map is more up to date and does not necessarily agree with the distribution shown in the inset.



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ECOLOGY

This small diurnal mongoose lives in territorial groups of up to 30 individuals (average 12) (Apps 2000). Typically, only the dominant pair breeds, while subordinates help with raising young and acting as sentinels (Creel & Waser 1994). One or two sentries keep a lookout while the rest of the group forages; group members are always within earshot of each other and maintain constant contact with short soft calls (Kern & Radford 2013). They produce 11 different alarm calls which indicate the type of predator and degree of risk (Collier *et al.* 2017), and flee for cover in hollow logs, termitaria and shallow burrows when an alarm is raised. At night they withdraw to their main refuges, within the ventilation shafts of disused termite mounds (Hiscocks & Perrin 1991). Groups have up to 30 of these overnight refuges within their territories, staying in a different refuge every day or two (Sharpe *et al.* 2012). Although they forage as a group, each individual finds its own prey (Apps 2000). They spend considerable time in the morning sun-bathing, grooming, playing and scent-marking (using an unusual hand-stand posture) around the current residence, then move off as a group to forage (Sharpe *et al.* 2012). They defaecate in middens which are visible around the dens, and the droppings are predominantly made up of fine insect fragments (Apps 2000).

Dwarf mongooses are largely insectivorous, but will also take spiders, scorpions and centipedes, small vertebrates and the eggs of ground birds (Apps 2000). This species is preyed on by larger mongooses and other small carnivores, raptors such as snake eagles and pale chanting goshawks, snakes and monitor lizards (Kern & Radford 2014). To evade predators, groups prefer to forage in the company of birds, particularly mixed species flocks, so they can utilise the birds' warning calls. Some populations have developed mutualistic relationships with fork-tailed drongos or yellow-billed hornbills: the mongooses rely on the birds' predator warnings while the birds obtain additional prey flushed by the mongooses (Rasa 1983, Sharpe *et al.* 2010). Due to their small size, dwarf mongooses are very vulnerable to predation (especially the young) which appears to be the main driver for their cooperative behaviour and group living (Rasa 1987).



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THREATS

No major threats are identified (Sharpe *et al.* 2015).

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern in Namibia. The species is widely distributed elsewhere in Africa, and can reach high densities within the range, so its status appears secure (Sharpe *et al.* 2015).

ACTIONS

No specific actions are needed for the conservation of this species.

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Reviewer: Lynda Sharpe

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