

Small-spotted Genet *Genetta genetta*



© B Curtis

Namibian conservation status	Least Concern
Global IUCN status	Least Concern
Namibian range	~812 500 km ² . Widespread except for the hyper-arid coastal zone, far north-central Namibia, and Namib Sand Sea
Global range	Three geographically separate zones: ▶ Southern Europe and North Africa ▶ A broad band across central Africa north of the Equator extending southwards to Kenya and Tanzania ▶ Western and southern Angola, Namibia, western Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa
Population estimate	~1.2 million in Namibia
Population trend	Stable
Habitat	Dense to open savanna, open woodland, also rocky areas with some tree cover. Less common in the mesic north-east. Often found close to human habitation
Threats	▶ Bush clearing ▶ Indiscriminate carnivore poisoning ▶ Roadkill ▶ Powerline electrocution ▶ Poaching for decorative pelts

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

Small-spotted genets are sometimes difficult to distinguish as they vary phenotypically and may be confused with large-spotted genets in the higher rainfall parts of Namibia where both species occur (Skinner & Chimimba 2005, Carvalho *et al.* 2016). They have a dorsal crest of black hair along the spine, and the small spots along the body are often so close together that they may appear as stripes in poor light. They usually have a white tip to the tail and dark-coloured legs, compared to the dark tail tip and pale legs of the large-spotted genet (Stuart & Stuart 2001, Skinner & Chimimba 2005, Delibes & Gaubert 2013).

DISTRIBUTION

Small-spotted genets occur throughout Namibia, except for the Namib Sand Sea and far north-central Namibia (Skinner

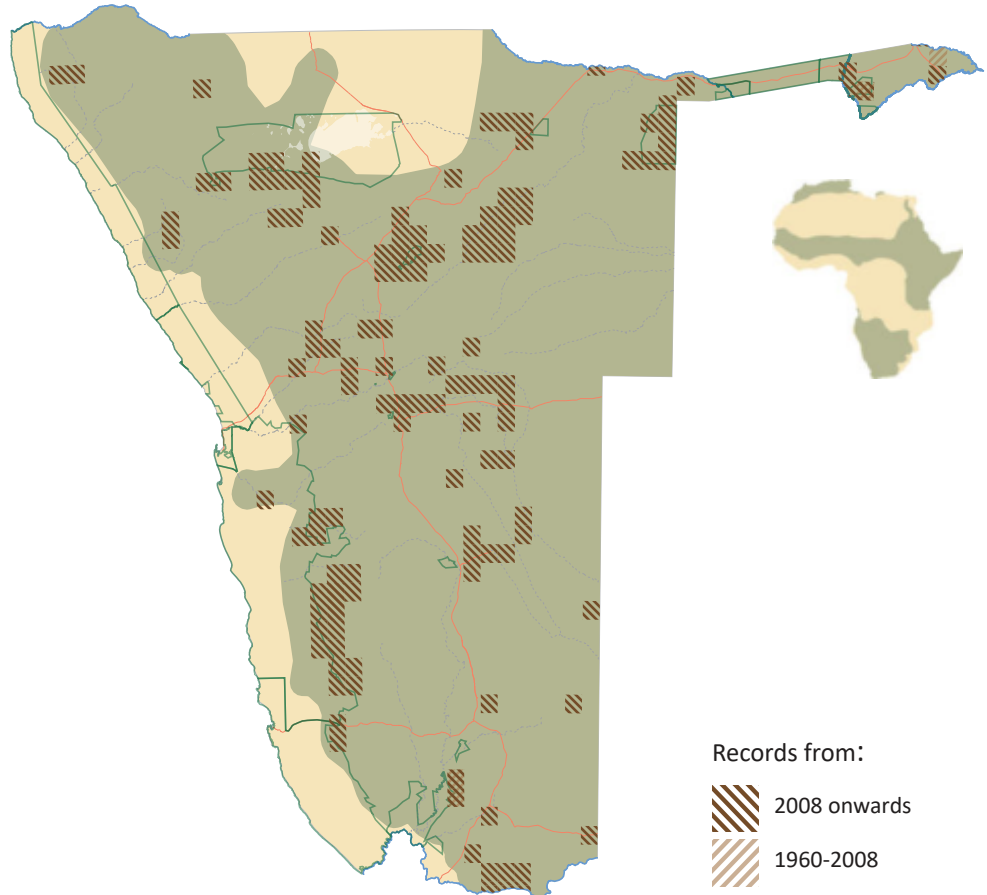
& Chimimba 2005, Gaubert *et al.* 2015, Environmental Information Service 2021). Increased deforestation, livestock density and crop farming in north-central Namibia (Klintonberg *et al.* 2007) has likely resulted in habitat not favoured by small-spotted genets. Although literature cites them to occur within a rainfall range of 100–800 mm, accounts from the early 20th century report them common even in the Rooibank area about 20 km inland from Walvis Bay in the hyper-arid coastal desert (Shortridge 1934) along the riparian woodland of the Kuiseb River. Records of the species span most of Namibia's vegetation biomes, with the highest density being in the central thornbush savanna (Environmental Information Service 2021). A number of sightings occur in arid areas with annual rainfall as low as 50 mm, where the riparian zone of ephemeral rivers provides sufficient prey and daytime cover.

Beyond Namibia they occur widely in South Africa,

Distribution records of small-spotted genet, and present estimated area of distribution in Namibia.

Inset: African distribution of small-spotted genet according to IUCN (Gaubert *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.



Botswana, Zimbabwe and southern Angola, except for high rainfall areas (in excess of 800 mm). In central Africa they occur in a band from Liberia in the west to Somalia in the east, extending northwards into Ethiopia and southward into Kenya and Tanzania. They are also found along the Mediterranean coast of North Africa and into southern and western Europe (Larivière & Calzada 2001, Skinner & Chimimba 2005, Gaubert *et al.* 2015).

POPULATION ESTIMATE AND TREND

Small-spotted genets are one of the most common carnivores in their global range (Waser 1980, Carvalho *et al.* 2016) with a density estimate of 150 individuals per 100 km². This extrapolates to an estimate of over 1.2 million individuals across their Namibian range. There have been no studies on their population density in Namibia, although they were found to be less common than other carnivore species such as black-backed jackal, yellow mongoose and African wild cat in the Kalahari (Mills *et al.* 1984, Blaum *et al.* 2008). Since much of their habitat is similar in other parts of southern Africa, they are expected to be abundant (Carvalho *et al.* 2016, ADU 2020). Small-spotted genet numbers are expected to be stable throughout their range in Namibia, although no specific studies have been conducted to confirm this. In the more mesic north-east they seem to be

gradually replaced by large-spotted genets (Environmental Information Service 2021), confirmed by a recent study which trapped both species in communal conservancies of the Kavango East Region (Hauptfleisch 2016).

ECOLOGY

Sufficient prey and day-time resting sites are important features for small-spotted genets (Carvalho *et al.* 2016). They are mostly nocturnal and rest in shrub thickets, large trees, tree cavities, rocky outcrops or burrows during the day (Mills *et al.* 1984, Skinner & Chimimba 2005, Camps 2011, Delibes & Gaubert 2013, Carvalho 2015). Associated with rivers and streams in more mesic countries, in Namibia they survive even in arid habitats as long as sufficient cover and fresh water is available, such as along some ephemeral rivers (Gaubert *et al.* 2015). They are commonly found near human habitation and on the fringes of urban areas as long as bush cover or woodland is nearby (Gaubert *et al.* 2015, Carvalho *et al.* 2016). They are socially solitary or less frequently in pairs and defend their territories (Carvalho *et al.* 2016). Females produce litters of two to five young during summer months, following approximately 10–11 weeks of gestation (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). Young are weaned by nine weeks, becoming fully grown and sexually mature by the age of 12 months.



Their wide carnivorous diet consists mostly of rodents, birds, reptiles and arthropods (Shortridge 1934, Virgós *et al.* 1999, Skinner & Chimimba 2005, Delibes & Gaubert 2013) while the remains of larger prey such as guineafowl and hares have been found at their burrows (Skinner & Chimimba 2005). In the central Namib plant material, mostly seeds of woody plants, were found to make up about 10% of their diet (Stuart 1977). They are often responsible for raiding domestic poultry coops and can cause substantial losses for poultry farmers (Larivière & Calzada 2001). They have been observed feeding on carrion, and raiding nests for eggs and young birds (Pienaar 1964).

THREATS

There are currently no serious threats to the species in Namibia.

Poisoning of carrion by livestock farmers may impact their numbers as they do scavenge when the opportunity arises. Although this indiscriminate persecution may reduce their numbers, the selective removal of larger carnivores such as jackal and cheetah by livestock farmers has been found to favour small-spotted genets through reduced inter-species competition (Blaum *et al.* 2007a, 2008, 2009b).

Genet road kills appear to be infrequent in Namibia (Environmental Information Service 2021), although in parts of their global range small-spotted genets, particularly subadults, are often killed on roads (Carvalho 2015). With

increasing traffic volumes in Namibia, road kills may become a factor affecting the stability of the population.

Bush encroachment is prolific across much of Namibia's arid savannas (Bester 1998, Joubert *et al.* 2017), particularly the central savannas which form the core of small-spotted genet distribution. This factor may be a double-edged sword for the species. Although moderate bush densities may be beneficial to small-spotted genets, excessive shrub encroachment is found to reduce arthropod productivity (Hering *et al.* 2019) and this may similarly reduce other prey availability for genets. Indiscriminate debushing such as bulldozing or poisoning is however expected to reduce small-spotted genet habitat.

There have been a number of records of electrocutions along powerlines (Environmental Information Service 2021) although the effect on the viability of the overall population is small.

They are sometimes hunted for meat, medicine or decorative fur pelts (Gaubert *et al.* 2015, Carvalho *et al.* 2016), but the species does not appear to be targeted in Namibia.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern. The wide range of habitats they occupy, their common occurrence and adaptable behaviour make the small-spotted genet a species that is not directly threatened in Namibia.

ACTIONS

There have been no studies on the ecology, habits and behaviour of the species in Namibia. Namibian conservation biology largely ignores small carnivores, making it difficult to provide an accurate estimate of population size and trends. More studies on small carnivores such as those of Blaum *et al.* (2007b, 2008) and Mills *et al.* (1984) in Namibian habitats should be encouraged.

The number of road kills and electrocutions should be monitored, with the Mammal Atlas of the Environmental Information Service being an ideal mechanism to support such monitoring.

Assessor: Morgan Hauptfleisch
Contributor: Nicky Knox
Reviewer: Filipe Carvalho

Suggested citation: Hauptfleisch M 2022. A conservation assessment of Small-spotted Genet *Genetta genetta*. In: NCE, LCMAN, MEFT (eds) 2022. Conservation Status and Red List of the Terrestrial Carnivores of Namibia. Pp 160-162. MEFT, LCMAN & NCE, Windhoek, Namibia