

Suricate *Suricata suricatta*



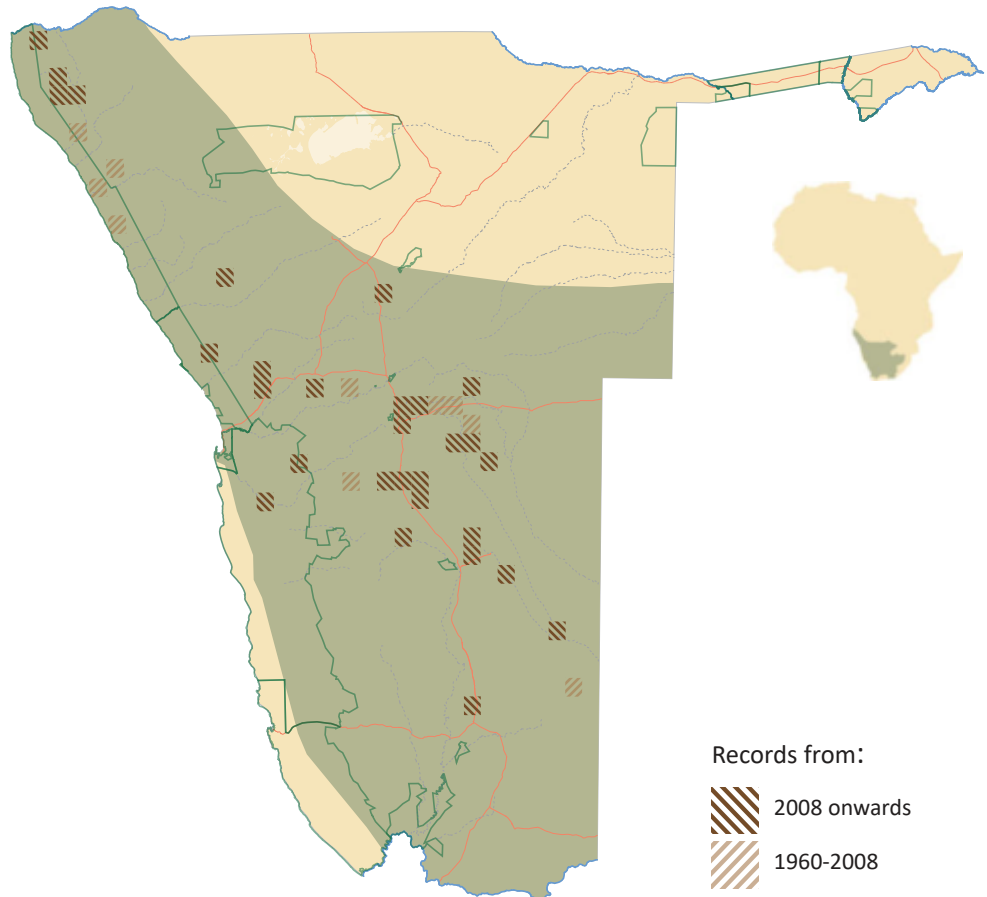
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Namibian conservation status	Least Concern
Global IUCN status	Least Concern First assessed in 1996 as Least Concern/Lower Risk
Namibian range	Drier north-western, central and southern parts of the country, but absent from the Namib Sand Sea
Global range	Endemic to southern Africa, range includes semi-arid to arid areas in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. Small extension into south-western corner of Angola
Population estimate	Unknown
Population trend	Unknown, but thought to be stable
Habitat	Arid, open grasslands or sparse scrubland/woodland. Absent from bare sand desert, thickly vegetated areas and forest
Threats	No major threats

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

Inset: African distribution of suricate according to IUCN (Jordan & Do Linh San 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.



IDENTIFYING FEATURES

A small mongoose that might be confused with the banded mongoose. The Afrikaans name “stokstertmeerkat” refers to the thin tail (not bushy) which is held vertically like a short whip when they are running. Features that identify this species are the light sandy-brown to silver-grey colouration on the body with indistinct, irregular transverse bars on the back, sharp pointed muzzle and dark “eye-shadow” in the eye sockets. They are always in groups, individuals usually seen huddled together while sitting upright on their haunches, or standing upright to look around.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Suricates (also known as meerkats) occur throughout the drier parts of southern Africa, occupying open, lightly vegetated country characterised by short grasses and sparse woody growth, in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa (MacDonald 2013). They are found in areas of sandy substrate in the Kalahari, but dig their burrows (or share burrows with other species) in patches that are stony or made firm with calcrete in the soil (van Staaden 1994; Waterman & Roth 2007).

Within Namibia they are absent from the north-eastern part

of the country, as they tend to avoid thick vegetation. They can survive in the driest parts of the Namib, even close to the coast, but they are always on gravel plains, not in sand dunes.

POPULATION ESTIMATE AND TREND

No estimate of the population in Namibia has been attempted. There is no evidence of an increase or decrease in numbers, therefore the population is assumed to be stable.

ECOLOGY

Suricates live in territorial colonies of 2–30 individuals (mean pack sizes 10 and 15 in South Africa and Botswana respectively), and are entirely diurnal (van Staaden 1994). They are very vulnerable to predators while foraging, especially juveniles whose vigilance and responses are not as sharp as the adults'. Raptors, snakes and mammalian carnivores (particularly jackals) are their main predators (Clutton-Brock *et al.* 1999, Apps 2012). A group of suricates, in turn, may attack and harass these animals, bunching together and chasing them off or killing those that they can, such as snakes (Apps 2012, Graw & Manser 2007). Larger groups are better able to defend against predators

than smaller groups through increased vigilance and pup protection (Clutton-Brock *et al.* 1999).

They emerge from the warren after sunrise and spend some time sun-bathing and grooming in their characteristic pose, sitting upright; they may retire to their burrow during the midday heat in summer (van Staaden 1994). In smaller groups only one female breeds, while two or three will breed in larger groups (Apps 2012). Burrows are often shared with ground squirrels or yellow mongooses; the squirrels benefit through increased vigilance provided by the mongoose species, while the mongooses benefit from the squirrels' burrowing activities (Waterman & Roth 2007).

Suricates eat a wide range of insects, especially larvae dug out of the ground, and other invertebrates such as scorpions, as well as small reptiles and birds (van Staaden 1994; Doolan & MacDonald 1996). They forage by scratching amongst vegetation, turning over objects and digging with their sharp claws to find their prey, all the time keeping in contact with soft grunts; food is not shared among adults, but youngsters up to 3 months old are fed by adults (Apps 2012). Non-breeding individuals take turns protecting young pups at the burrow, during which time they cannot forage; the length of time individuals spend babysitting increases with declining group size (Clutton-Brock *et al.* 1998). The group always posts a sentry who stands on an elevated rock or low bush to look out for predators; different alarm calls are given for aerial or terrestrial predators (Manser 2001). The group will either flee for the burrow, stand upright, or join the caller as part of a mob depending on the type and urgency of the call (Manser 2001).



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THREATS

No major threats are identified. Bush encroachment in central Namibia may reduce habitat suitability for the species in the central part of the country (Blaum *et al.* 2007b), but this applies mainly to the northern edges of their range.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern in Namibia. The species is relatively widespread within southern Africa and there are no major direct or indirect threats (Jordan & Do Linh San 2015).

ACTIONS

The capturing and keeping of baby suricates as pets should be discouraged.

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

Assessors: John Pallett and Gail Thomson
Reviewer: Peter Apps

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