



**MAMMALS OF SOUTH ASIA. Volume 1.**  
**Editors: AJT Johnsingh and Nima Manjrekar;**  
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Dr. AJT Johnsingh and Dr. Nima Manjrekar, the editors, are well known field biologists with special reference to mammals. The present volume has been painstakingly compiled with contributions from forty four eminent mammalogists of the world. The book covers primarily the species of primates and carnivores with single chapter each on insectivores, tree shrews and bats. I could run out of superlatives to describe this book.

The term South Asia applies to the biogeographical area, which includes Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Based on opinions of some biogeographers, part of Afghanistan and Myanmar are also considered as being a part of South Asian regions. Diversified climatic conditions, enormous ecodiversity and geodiversity have resulted South Asia as a region of

numerous habitats and biomes each with its teeming millions of life forms. Mammalian fauna, though not very high in number of species, but is one of the most fascinating features of the biodiversity. It encompasses species as large as whales, elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers and as small as shrews, mice, bats. Bewildering diversities in form and structure make them fit for most varied modes of existence such as volant, arboreal, aquatic, ground dwelling and fossorial in all types of habitats from deep sea to snow-clad mountains, from desert to dense forest. Apart from importance of their role in various ecosystems, since the dawn of human civilization, mammalian species have been used as beast of burden, friends of agriculture, and sources of milk, protein, clothing, medicines and valuable economic assets. However, due to various ill-conceived developmental policies, and to meet up the needs, greed and ego of human species, a number of mammalian species became extinct in the recent past and many more are on the verge of extinction. To conserve the most important natural asset, popularization of science among the masses and dissemination of its truth and discoveries are urgent requirement of the day. Knowledge about the South Asian mammals has gained a momentum chiefly through the Mammal Survey (1911-28) of the Indian subcontinent by the Bombay Natural History Society. Since then several thousand research papers and a number of books on the subject were published. All the relevant information contained in those publications have suitably been updated and synthesized in the present book.

In the introductory chapter, readers are apprised of the evolution, zoogeography and classification of South Asian mammals. Family-wise species diversity in India as compared to entire South Asia is provided in a tabular form. Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) has given special economic significance to the endemic species of a country. Thus the list of country-wise endemic species is also included to cover the purpose of the policy makers as well as biologists.

Chapters on Insectivores, Tree shrews, Bats, Herpestids –Viverrids –Mustelids, Otters and Small Cats describe almost all the species belonging to them. These chapters give information on taxonomy and distribution, morphological features, habit and habitats, ecology and

behavior, population status and conservation issues of each of the species. Chapters on two species of Lories, six of Macaque, six of Langur, Hoolock Gibbon, Red Panda, Golden Jackal, Indian Wolf, Asiatic Wild Dog, Striped Hyena, four of Large Cats, and three of Bears are the outcome of prolonged research works and collection of vital information from earlier studies. Scientific facts about each of these species are served in a language which touches serious scholar as well as amateur. It is really fascinating to read an account of social organization of Lion, Indian Wolf, different species of primates; hunting and feeding behavior of large cats, canids; sleep behaviour and vocalization of Hoolock Gibbon; diet and hibernation of bears. Analysis of the threat factors and population trends of most of the species strongly postulate the immediate conservation measures for them. In fact, each species account is a masterpiece of natural history writing and guides to discover the population dynamics, assess the effects of fragmentation of natural habitats, and determine what management steps are required for flourishing the ecosystems with their full compliments of species.

Apart from the large number of tables, the book is profusely illustrated with maps, colour as well as black and white photographs. These make explanation easy and speak eloquently about the natural history of mammals. Each chapter is followed by a list of relevant literature which facilitates to search the details of the subject of further interest.

The book is not without blemishes. There are some discrepancies as regard the number of species and genera under different families mentioned in the Introduction and the same in the subsequent chapters. Order

Insectivora is now split into two Orders viz., Erinaceomorpha and Soricomorpha, and the same classification is followed in Introduction and Insectivores chapters. However, in the contents, both are placed under the order Insectivora. Similarly, Red Panda though treated under the family Ailuridae in Introduction and relevant chapter, but shown under the family Procyonidae in the contents. There are records of Madras Tree Shrew from West Bengal (Agrawal et al. 1992) and Rusty Spotted cat from Jammu and Kashmir (Chakraborty 1979). However, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir are omitted from the distributional range of Madras Tree Shrew and Rusty Spotted cat respectively. Under literature cited, often the standard abbreviations for the name of journals are not followed, eg. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* (pg. 251, 268), *J. Bom. Nat. Hist. Soc.* (pg. 375, 415), *J. Mammalogy* (pg. 92), *J. Mammal.* (pg. 413).

In spite of some minor flaws, the book is really impressive, deserving all appreciation for a sincere effort to compile up to date scientific information on South Asian mammals and representing the same in a systematic way. In fact, I cannot resist myself to conclude the review with the comments of Dr. G.B. Schaller made in the foreword of this volume – ‘A milestone in the natural history of the subcontinent – an indispensable, detailed source of information and value to everyone interested in mammals, whether lay person or scientist’.

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