

NOTE ON THE TAXONOMY OF GENETTA

JOÃO CRAWFORD DE MENESES CABRAL

Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola

Following mainly the revision by Schwarz (*Rev. Zool. et Bot. Africaines*, 19: 275–286, 1930), contemporary authors (e.g. Ansell, *Mammals of Northern Rhodesia*, 1960; Meester, Davis and Coetsee, *An Interim Classification of Southern African Mammals*, 1964) recognise only two species of *Genetta* (*genetta* and *tigrina*) within southern Africa. I disagree with this opinion, on the basis of a study of material of this genus, collected in Angola and housed in the I.I.C.A. The evidence shows that:

1. *Genetta angolensis* is quite distinct from *rubiginosa*. In central Angola the two forms are sympatric and it is, therefore, impossible to maintain them as conspecific.
2. *Genetta* “*genetta*” *hintoni*, in southern Angola is sympatric with *G. genetta pulchra* (= *felina*) and is quite distinct from it. It is, therefore, impossible to maintain *hintoni* as a subspecies of *G. genetta*.
3. A number of specimens collected from a single population in central Angola, clearly belonging to *G. angolensis* (a species originally described from a melanistic animal), show two completely different colour phases and some intermediates. The non-melanistic specimens are very similar to *hintoni*, and it is difficult to find any distinctive characteristic that consistently differentiates the two forms. I am persuaded that *hintoni* and *angolensis* are, actually, a single species.

Further, following examination of specimens in the Transvaal Museum, it is possible to state that *Genetta rubiginosa* and *G. tigrina* are not conspecific, the material from Natal showing no intergradation; and that *G. mossambica* is quite distinct from *G. rubiginosa zambesiana* and must be regarded as a different species.

From these studies it would appear that the southern African forms of *Genetta* fall into three groups, as under.

(a) The *G. rubiginosa* group, with a single species in southern Africa, *Genetta rubiginosa*, in which the skulls have the intertemporal region constricted and the sagittal crest developed. Several subspecies have been described: The southern long-haired animals (*rubiginosa*, *letabae*, *albiventris*, *zuluensis*) are synonymous with the nominate subspecies. A different subspecies seems to be the short-haired *G. r. zambesiana* (including perhaps *gleimi*, from Angola). *G. r. soror* from Katanga is possibly a third subspecies. The forms regarded by Schwarz as belonging to the *amer* group (*feldiana*, *aequatorialis*, etc.), all mainly grassland inhabitants, should also be included in *G. rubiginosa*, perhaps as subspecies.

(b) The *G. genetta* group, a superspecies with three species in Africa: *Genetta genetta*, *G. senegalensis* and *G. felina*—or, perhaps, a single species, *Genetta genetta*, with three isolated groups of subspecies. The southern African group, *felina*, seems to form a cline from the greyish *felina* through the intermediate *pulchra*, to the yellowish *bella* from Luanda. The genets belonging to the *felina* group occupy the drier open plains and their (adult) skulls,

unlike those of *rubiginosa*, retain infantile features, with an enlarged intertemporal and the sagittal crest not developed.

(c) The *G. tigrina* group: This is distinguished from the *rubiginosa* group by the smaller number of tail rings and by the dark coloration of the hind legs, and from the *genetta* group by the tip of the tail being black instead of white. The skulls differ according to species but are all roughly intermediate between the skulls of *rubiginosa* and *felina*. Three distinct species of this group occur in southern Africa: *Genetta tigrina*, from the Cape; *Genetta mossambica*, from the coast of Mocambique and southern Tanzania; and *Genetta angolensis* (including *hintoni*), from Angola, Zambia and, possibly, the southern Congo. These animals are found in forest regions and woodlands.

According to Schwarz, there are another four, extralimital species of genet, namely *G. maculata*, *G. victoriae*, *G. servalina* and *G. abyssinica*. The first is, perhaps, near *rubiginosa*, the second seems to belong to the *tigrina* group, while the other two must, for the present, be regarded as forming two further distinct groups.

A study of the Angolan material of *Genetta* thus leads me to believe that the genus as a whole is in need of a full and critical revision.

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