

Common Palm Civet

Paradoxurus hermaphroditus



Also called as the “Toddy Cat” for its fondness of toddy liquor.

The Common Palm Civet is also called the Toddy Cat. The name comes about because this creature is apparently fond of drinking from vessels put in palm trees to collect sap for making toddy or palm sugar. It is also known as the Asian Palm civet or ‘Musang’.

It is distributed from Kashmir, the Himalayas, and Assam southwards through the whole of the Peninsula, except in the desert zones of Sind and Punjab. Eastwards, Burma and the Indo-Chinese and Malay countries.

This civet is more common and abundant in well-wooded regions. It lives much on trees, lying curled up by day among the branches or in a hole in the trunk. Near towns and villages large mango trees or palm trees are a favourite shelter. But it is a highly adaptive animal and can live in dense forests, agricultural lands and even in the heart of crowded cities, selecting a roof, an outhouse or drain as a place of hiding. Pineapple and coffee plantations are a favourite resort in the fruiting season.

Common Palm Civet Characteristics

The Common Palm Civet weighs around 3.2 kg (7 lb) and has a body length of 53cm (21 inches). The Common Palm has a tail length of 48cm (19 inches). It's long, stocky body is covered with coarse, shaggy hair that is usually a greyish colour.

The Common Palm Civet has black markings on its feet, ears and muzzle. It also has three rows of black markings on its main body.

The markings on it's face resemble a raccoon's. It's tail does not have rings, unlike similar palm civet species. The Common Palm Civet has sharp claws which allow it to climb trees and house gutters.

Diet

The Common Palm Civet is a nocturnal omnivore. Its primary food source is fruit such as chiku, mango and rambutan (a medium-sized tropical tree). It also has a fondness for palm flower sap which, when fermented, becomes 'toddy', a sweet liquor.

The Common Palm Civet is also fond of coffee cherries. They eat the outer fruit and the coffee beans pass through their digestive tract. An expensive coffee called 'kopi luwak' is supposedly made from these coffee beans. Kopi luwak is said to have a gamy flavour and sells for more than \$100 per pound.

Common Palm Civets will eat reptiles, eggs and insects as well.

Habitat

Common Palm Civets live in tropical forested habitats, parks and suburban gardens where mature fruit trees and fig trees grow and undisturbed vegetation.

Reproduction

Both male and female have scent glands underneath the tail that resemble testicles. It can spray a noxious secretion from these glands. The common palm civet is solitary, nocturnal and arboreal. Common Palm Civets spend the day asleep in a tree hollow. Common Palm Civets are territorial.

Common Palm Civets reproduce throughout the year although it has been recorded that kittens are most often seen from October to December. Kittens are born in a litter of 2 to 5 young. Palm civets become sexually mature at 11 to 12 months. In captivity the common palm civet can live up to 22 years.

Young are born in tree hollows or in boulder crevices. During brief periods of mating and when the females have their young, the civets occupy resting trees together.



Behaviour

Common Palm Civets forage mainly at night. The likelihood of encountering predators during the day may have favoured nocturnal foraging behaviour. The activity period, from around 6pm in the evening to 4am in the morning, is influenced by daylight. Palm civets become active only after dark and retreat to rest sites just before dawn.

When foraging in the same area, civets repeatedly use the same resting trees. Resting trees with vines and holes are preferred by the civets and are used for several consecutive days.

Interesting facts about the Common Palm Civet

In Sri Lanka, the palm civet is known as 'Uguduwa' by the Sinhala speaking community. In most parts of the island, the civets become a menace to the people due to fact that it litters in ceilings and attics of common households and then makes loud noises at night disturbing the sleep of the inhabitants of the house (noises are mostly due to their movements and fights).

Palm Civet Conservation Status

Common Palm Civets are classed as 'Least Concern'. It is plentiful in its natural range.

References: S. H. Prater 'The book of Indian Animals', Wikipeddia.