

Scavenging by Common Mongoose in Gulab Bagh Zoo and Sajjangarh WL Sanctuary

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On July 3, 2008 at about 1100 hrs, while taking round in Gulab Bagh Zoo, I saw two individuals of Common Mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsii*) feeding on fresh buffalo flesh in the cage of a Hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*). The flesh was lying on the floor of one of twin feeding chambers. The Hyena was sleeping only 2m away from the pieces of flesh in another chamber and was visible from the first chamber. The caretaker and I and a few visitors were standing near the barrier and the feeding mongooses were clearly visible as they were hardly 10m away from us. They did not take much notice of our presence and that of the sleeping hyena. To avoid being visible to us, they hid themselves behind the big pieces of the flesh and remained busy in feeding for more than seven minutes. After taking sufficient food, they came out through the bars of the door.

Similar feeding pattern is adopted by *H. edwardsii* in Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary near Gorella village. Gorella is a small village which is present near southern end of Sajjangarh Sanctuary. Dead cattle are disposed of by the villagers of Gorella very close to sanctuary.

Sajjangarh is a walled sanctuary. Small perforations have been left at the bottom of the wall at places to facilitate natural drainage of the rain water. The mongooses from the sanctuary area use these perforations to come outside. They feed singly or in small parties on cattle carcasses. After scavenging, they return to sanctuary area through the same perforations. Common Mongoose *H. edwardsii* and Ruddy Mongoose *H. smithi* both feed on trampled

small reptiles, birds and mammals on main gate - Monsoon palace road inside the sanctuary.

Common mongoose (*H. edwardsii*) around Sajjangarh Sanctuary area have quite interesting feeding habits. They enter human dwellings and have been seen feeding on grains of drying wheat in the courtyards of houses. Probably they like wheat weevils but they were even seen taking weevil free grains also. On a winter morning, I observed a Common Mongoose entering a house in Rampura colony on the western outskirts of Udaipur city, where cow milk and crushed *roti* (made of wheat flour) was offered in a bowl to the pet cat by the owner of the house. While the cat was busy feeding the mongoose approached the cat and charged at it.

The cat immediately moved a bit and gave room to the mongoose. The mongoose quickly started feeding on the milk and *roti* without any fear. My friend, the owner of the house, informed me about two individuals of mongoose of the nearby area that have become habituated to feed on milk and *roti* that sometimes both come for feeding on milk and *roti*.

Since the common mongoose is a carnivore and can kill small mammals and birds in the zoo, the zookeepers should take care to keep away the mongoose from the enclosures of small animals by proper maintenance of the enclosures especially doors and other prone areas of the cages. Even they can climb on the rough vertical walls and on trees too, hence proofing should be done up to the ventilators.

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