



INDIAN SHREW

First record of Hill Shrew *Suncus montanus niger* from the Baba-budan Hills, Chikkamagaluru District, Western Ghats, Karnataka, India



The individual of Hill Shrew *Suncus montanus niger* that was observed in Baba-budan hills, Chikkamagaluru District

Mammalia
[Class of Mammals]

Eulipotyphla
[Order of Shrews and Moles]

Soricidae
[Family of True Shrews]

Suncus montanus niger
[Hill Shrew]

Species described by
Horsfield in 1851

Hill Shrew *Suncus montanus niger* (Horsfield, 1851) also known as Nilgiri Highland Shrew and Indian Highland Shrew is endemic to the Western Ghats of Southern India (Meegaskumbura & Schneider, 2009; Molur & Singh, 2009; Srinivasulu & Srinivasulu, 2012). Distributed among the highlands of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, they are found both inside (Molur et al., 2005) and outside protected areas (Molur & Singh, 2009). It occurs in the wet and humid regions of the moist deciduous forests, as well as evergreen montane forests and grasslands, between elevations of 900-2400m (Molur et al., 2005; Menon, 2014). However, it has never been sighted in Chikkamagaluru District, nor anywhere north of Coorg District,



Karnataka (Molur et al., 2005; Molur & Singh, 2009). In this note we place on record, the sighting of Hill Shrew *Suncus montanus niger* in the montane grasslands of Baba-budan hills in Central Western Ghats, Chikkamagaluru District, Karnataka. This observation now constitutes a new site record and the northern-most known distribution for the species.

Global Distribution:
India and Sri Lanka

The Chikkamagaluru District consists of deciduous, evergreen, semi-evergreen climax forests and their degradation types (Pascal, 1982). Champion and Seth categorized the area as “Western tropical evergreen” (1968). Baba-budan range consists of rolling hills covered with grasslands alternating with shola woods. These sholas (Davidar et al., 2007) unlike at Anamalais, Nilgiris and Palanis occur at medium elevation ranging from 1400–1800 m. In the District, sholas can also be found in Kudremukha, Gangamula, and patches of Charmadi Ghats. With Mullayanagiri, the highest peak in the state (elevation: 1927 m) the range geographically acts as part of south-eastern boundary of Bhadra Tiger Reserve and a crucial water catchment area for the tributaries of river Bhadra.

The Hill Shrew was sighted at an altitude of 1707 m (position: 13.437945N & 75.758163E) at 13:12 hrs on 17 July 2016. The shrew was first seen crossing the road while we were driving on the ridge observing wildlife and local conservation issues. We were able to observe the shrew for over two minutes. The shrew, very similar to the Grey Musk Shrew (*S. murinus*), was distinguished by the overall blackish body and; distinctly dark hands, feet, tail, ears and muzzle. The shrew had a dark slender tail with black hairs. It was extremely docile, and non-squeaky unlike *S. murinus*.

This observation now indicates a probable occurrence of the species in sholas of Kudremukha and Charmadi Ghats with similar elevation gradient and habitat structure, and needs to be further explored.

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Acknowledgements: We are grateful to all the members of wildlife Conservation Action Team – Chikkamagaluru and Bhadra Wildlife Conservation Trust for their support. We also thank Parvathi K. Prasad for her comments and edits regarding the note.

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Citation: Sagar, H.S.S.C., D.V. Girish, C.V. Bharath, M.C. Madhusudhan, I.M. Sharath, K. Kumar, B. Amarnath & M.M. Surya (2017). Indian Shrew: First record of Hill Shrew *Suncus niger* from the Bababudan Hills, Chikkamagaluru District, Western Ghats, Karnataka, India. *Small Mammal Mail*#414. In: *Zoo's Print* 32(11): 34:36