Night Life

Small Indian Civet

The small Indian civet (*Viverricula indica*) is native to South and Southeast Asia, although it is also found in some of the western Indian Ocean islands such as Madagascar, Mayotte and Comoros where it was introduced, most likely for trade in animal parts. The small Indian civet is nocturnal and largely terrestrial, though the species can climb trees well. They are very adaptable and occupy a range of habitats from grasslands and riverine areas to deciduous, semi-evergreen, and thorn forests and even agricultural areas. They usually shelter in burrows (both of their own making as well as those abandoned by other species), under rocks or in thick bush. They feed primarily on insects, rats, mice, snakes and small birds and occasionally on fruits and roots. When found in suburban areas, they are known to shelter in gutters or similar dark, hollow spaces and hunt poultry. Their adaptability has allowed them to thrive even in areas with extensive deforestation, and the species is categorized as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List, indicating a widespread, abundant and stable population status. However, actual population numbers are unknown, and the species is hunted and trapped widely, primarily for the skin and the perineal gland secretion called civet musk, and secondarily for meat. The gland secretion is used in perfumes, medicine, and other industries. Interestingly, this civet musk is used for religious rituals in the Tirupati Tirumala temple in Andhra Pradesh, for which purpose, small Indian civets were bred by temple authorities in the temples dairy farm until 2008.

Photo credit: Kalyan Varma

Text credit: Sindhu Radhakrishna