

## RESEARCH NOTES

## (I)

OBSERVATIONS ON THE FLYING SQUIRRELS *PETAURISTA PETAURISTA PHILIPPENSIS* (ELLIOT) AND *PETINOMYS FUSCOCAPILLUS* (JERDON) IN PERIYAR TIGER RESERVE AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

The Large Flying Squirrel *Petaurista petaurista* has a wide distribution in India. In Kerala it occurs in the forests, in the hills and foot hills of the Ghats and occasionally upto the sea coast. Two specimens collected from Coastal Kerala are kept in the Zoology Museums of Calicut University and Farook College. A second species the Travancore Flying Squirrel *Petinomys fuscocapillus* also occurs in Kerala, the distribution of which is not known. Other than some scanty notes (Hutton, 1947; Minette, 1947; Kurup, 1989; Ashraf *et al.*, 1993) very little information is available on the habits and habitats of the two species in Kerala.

The two species of Flying Squirrels occur in Periyar Tiger Reserve and in the neighbouring plantations. Two specimens of the large Flying Squirrel *P. petaurista* electrocuted near the Aranyanivas and one specimen of the *P. fuscocapillus* retrieved from a local man are kept in the museum of the Rajiv Gandhi Centre, Thekkady. The following is a note on the habitats of the two species, observed in the field, and collected from local hunters. The data though scanty, is expected to provide some information on these animals.

The behaviour pattern of the two species of Flying Squirrels is almost similar. Both the species are nocturnal, spending the daytime in the hollows of tree trunks,

and come out in the evening for feeding intensively for about 3 hours after which feeding activity slackens. Observations on the food habits were collected in the border areas of the Reserve at random and from the neighbouring plantations mostly during full moon days. The trees on which the Squirrels feed, were flagged and identified on the next day morning.

The large Flying Squirrel was found consuming fruits/flowers of the following trees :

<i>Artocarpus lackoocha</i>	Fruits
<i>A. hirsuta</i>	"
<i>A. integrifolia</i>	"
<i>Ficus beddomei</i>	"
<i>F. tajakela</i>	"
<i>F. mysorensis</i>	"
<i>Eleocarpus oblongus</i>	"
<i>E. tuberculatus</i>	"
<i>Bischofia javanica</i>	"
<i>Diospyros montana</i>	"
<i>Pallaquium ellipticum</i>	"
<i>Mangifera indica</i>	"
<i>Myristica contorta</i>	Fruit/Flower.
<i>Vernonia monosis</i>	Flower
<i>Terminalia paniculata</i>	"

Stomach of one dead specimen electrocuted in Dec. 1995 was full of *Terminalia paniculata* flowers.

The small Flying Squirrel was observed

to consume fruits and flowers of the following plants :

<i>Artocarpus gomesianus</i>	Fruit
<i>Ficus exaspirata</i>	"
<i>F. beddomei</i>	"
<i>Olea dioicea</i>	"
<i>Mangifera indica</i>	"
<i>Flacourtia montana</i>	"
<i>Pallaquium ellipticum</i>	"
<i>Mallotus tetracoccus</i>	Flower
<i>Vernonia monosis</i>	"
<i>Evodia lunu-ankenda</i>	"

Squirrels are known to destroy tender coconuts. In the coastal North Kerala, the large Flying Squirrel causes serious damage to coconut plantations according to farmers. Coconuts are given as rewards to those who kill Flying Squirrels in Chawkad area (coastal area of Trichur District).

No information is available about the breeding biology. Observations show that mating takes place in January/February month and the animals killed in the plantations in the March/April had fully grown embryos.

Both the large and small Flying

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