

# Notes on the distribution of Marbled Polecat *Vormela peregusna* in Mongolia

Sandui DULAMT SEREN<sup>1</sup>, Setev SHAR<sup>2</sup>, James D. MURDOCH<sup>3</sup>, Richard P. READING<sup>4\*</sup>, Jamsran GANTULGA<sup>5</sup>, Dorj USUKHJARGAL<sup>6</sup> and Suuri BUYANDELGER<sup>7</sup>

## Abstract

We report three new locations of Marbled Polecat *Vormela peregusna* in Mongolia, comprising: 1) the Tuul river valley in Altanbulag soum, Tuv aimag; 2) the northern slope of the Mongol Altai mountain range in Tsetseg soum, Khovd aimag; and 3) the Ikh Nart Nature Reserve in Dalanjargalan soum, Dornogobi aimag. To our knowledge, the Marbled Polecat has not been previously recorded in these areas and our observations expand the known distribution of the species in the country. Currently, specimens of Marbled Polecat, represented as 11 pelts and nine skulls (two as stuffed animals), are housed in collections of five research institutions and museums of Mongolia.

**Keywords:** Altai Mountain Range, Ikh Nart Nature Reserve, range extension, specimen listing, Tuv aimag

## Монгол орны эрэн хүрний (*Vormela peregusna* Guldenstaedt, 1770) тархцын судалгаанд нэмэрлэх олдворууд

С. Дуламцэрэн<sup>1</sup>, Richard Reading<sup>2</sup>, С. Шар<sup>3</sup>, James D. Murdoch<sup>4</sup>, Ж. Гантулга<sup>5</sup>, Д. Өсөхжаргал<sup>6</sup>, С. Буяндэлгэр<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Шинжлэх Ухааны Академийн Биологийн Хүрээлэн; <sup>2</sup>Денверийн Зоологийн Сан; <sup>3</sup>Монгол Улсын Их Сургуулийн Амьтан Судлалын Тэнхим; <sup>4</sup>Оксфордын Их Сургууль; <sup>5</sup>Эко-Ази Дээд Сургууль; <sup>6</sup>Хустайн Байгалийн Цогцолборт Газрын Төв; <sup>7</sup>Их Наргын Байгалийн Нөөц Газар

## Товч агуулга

Монголд эрэн хүрнэ нэлээд өргөн дэлгэр тархцатай ч хааяагүй элбэг биш, хүнд үзэгдэж харагдах нь ч цөөн, агнуурын үслэг арьсны бэлтгэлд ордоггүй учраас арьс үслэгийг нь шохоорхож хэрэглэдэггүй, хүмүүс сайн мэддэггүй, арьс гавлын яс гэх мэт хэрэглэхүүн нь судалгаа шинжилгээний байгууллагын цуглуулга, сан хөмрөг, музейн үзмэрт ч ховор байдаг. Бид Монголын баруун болон төв хэсэгт эрэн хүрний олдсон гурван шинэ цэг нутгийг (Ховд аймгийн Цэцэг сум, Төв аймгийн Алтан булаг сум мөн Дорноговь аймгийн Даланжаргалан сум) нэмэн тэмдэглэж, тус улсын эрдэм шинжилгээний байгууллага музейд хадгалагдаж байгаа судалгааны холбогдолтой эрэн хүрний хэрэглэхүүнийг тодруулж мэдээлэв.

**Түлхүүр үг:** Алтайн нуруу, Их Наргын Байгалийн Нөөц Газар, Төв аймаг, чихмэлийн жагсаалт

## Introduction

Early accounts of Marbled Polecat *Vormela peregusna* in Mongolia reported that it ranged throughout the Gobi Desert, based on observations and specimens (pelts) collected by A. G. Bannikov (1954). Dulamtseren (1970) and Sokolov & Orlov (1980) published additional accounts of Marbled Polecat and mapped the species's distribution, which included the western and southern desert regions of Mongolia. The map was based on oral statements, pelt data, questionnaire surveys and museum collections. Subsequently, Marbled Polecats have been recorded in 10 locations (Avirmed 1972, Khotolxuu 1985, Chotolchuu *et al.* 1989, Dulamtseren *et al.* 1999) from central, western, and northwestern parts of Mongolia, all within the range published by Dulamtseren (1970) and Sokolov & Orlov (1980). Thus, the Marbled Polecat's previously known distribution in Mongolia ranged along the high steppe of the Mongol Altai to southern Siberia and the desert of Ikh Nuuruudiin Khotgor. More recent locations outside Mongolia have been recorded along the southern border of the Tuva Republic of Russia, in the Tes river valley near the Mongolian border, and near Tsagaan Shiveet Mountain (Boyarkin 1997, Sidorov & Vakhrushev 1997, Rozhnov 2001, 2003, Putintsev *et al.* 2002).

Clark *et al.* (2006) published the most recent range map for Marbled Polecats in Mongolia. A panel of mammal experts from Mongolia reviewed the maps in Dulamtseren (1970) and Sokolov & Orlov (1980) and provided their rationale for any changes in

the Mongolian Biodiversity Databank available from the Department of Zoology of the Mongolian National University (Clark *et al.* 2006).

## Observations

In recent years, since 2002, we recorded Marbled Polecat in three regions outside the species's known range (Fig. 1). They are:

1. Tuul river valley. Two of us (J.G. & D.U.) collected a Marbled Polecat skull and pelt from a poacher who showed us the trap site in a shrubland steppe area of the Tuul River valley, Altanbulag soum, Tuv aimag (47°30'23"N, 105°59'02"E; 1,290 m elevation). The skull and pelt were deposited in a collection at Hustai National Park. This location lies approximately 250 km north of the border of the previously known Marbled Polecat's distribution.
2. Northern slope of the Mongol Altai Mountain Range. One of us (S.S.) received, in summer 2003, the skull of a Marbled Polecat from a herder named Sainbayar whose dog killed the animal in December 2002, in Bachaa, Tsetseg soum, Khovd aimag (46°30'49"N, 92°24'08"E; 1,800 m elevation). The skull has been deposited in the mammal collection of National University of Mongolia.
3. Ikh Nart Nature Reserve. One of us (J.D.M.) recorded an individual by spotlight and captured another (Fig. 2) in a live-trap set as part of study of carnivore behaviour and ecology

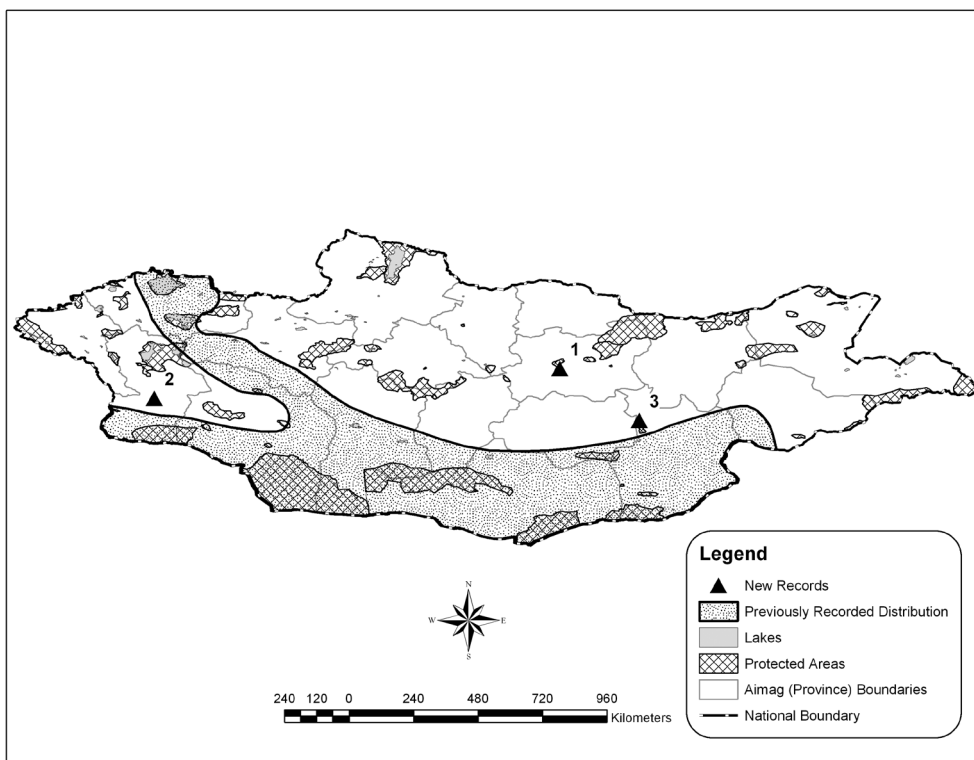


Fig. 1. Marbled Polecat *Vormela peregusna* distribution in Mongolia. Numbers match numbers of new records discussed in text. Previous recorded range adapted from Clark et al. (2006) to allow inclusion in a geographic information system.



Fig. 2. Marbled Polecat captured in Ikh Nart Nature Reserve, Dornogobi aimag (Photo: David Kenny).

in northern Ikh Nart Nature Reserve, Dalanjargalan soum, Dornogobi aimag, in 2006 (45°46'15"N, 108°38'57"E). We released the animal. Another one of us (R.P.R.) found the remains of a Marbled Polecat in a Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* nest in Ikh Nart the previous year (45°41'03"N, 108°35'29"E, 1,200 m elevation). We did not collect these remains.

## Discussion

The Marbled Polecat is one of the most widely distributed small carnivores in Eurasia inhabiting mainly steppe, semi-desert, and desert environments. Its range countries include Serbia, Montenegro, Greece, Romania, Macedonia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Turkey, Russia, Lebanon, Israel, Syria, Georgia, Iraq, Armenia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and Mongolia (Heptner et al. 1967, Wozencraft

2005, Clark et al. 2006). In many areas, however, populations have declined substantially in recent years. Some researchers also believe that the species has been extirpated from much of the eastern part of its range (Sadikov 1983, Shagdarsuren & Erdenejav 1988, Anonymous 1991, Shiirevdamba 1997, Rozhnov 2001, Putintsev et al. 2002, Clark et al. 2006). The Marbled Polecat is listed as threatened in Uzbekistan (Sadikov 1983), Kazakhstan (Anonymous 1991), Russia (Rozhnov 2001) and Mongolia (Shagdarsuren & Erdenejav 1988, Shiirevdamba 1997, Clark et al. 2006). It is listed as Vulnerable globally (IUCN 2008).

The Marbled Polecat is widely distributed but rarely observed, so few details of its biology, distribution, and population status are known. In Mongolia, little knowledge exists about the species, largely because it is rarely seen and its pelt has little economic value. Museum specimens of Marbled Polecat are also few (Dulamtseren et al. 1999). Those known comprise seven pelts and six skulls in the Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences; a pelt and a skull in a collection of the Department of Zoology, National University of Mongolia; a taxidermy specimen (pelt) on exhibit in the mammal collection of the Natural History Museum of Mongolia; another taxidermy specimen (pelt and skull) listed in a database of Uvs aimag Nature Reserve (Fig. 3); and a pelt and skull in the collection at Hustai National Park (Table 1).

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Table 1. Marbled Polecat *Vormela peregusna specimens* in Mongolian collections.

Specimen Location	Accession Number	Collection Date	Collection Location	Material	Collector
<i>Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences</i>					
	3643	1976	Tonkhil soum, Gobi-Altai aimag	Pelt	N. Khotolkhuu
	3644	1976	Bogd soum, Bayankhongor aimag	Pelt	N. Khotolkhuu
	4129	1986	South of Zuun Saikhan Mountain, Khurmen soum, Omnogobi aimag	Pelt & skull	G. Dashzeveg
	4130	1984	Galt Mountain, Saikhan Ovoo soum, Dundgobi aimag	Pelt & skull	G. Dashzeveg
	4249	1988	Khuvkhuljin Well, Mandakh Brigade, Khankhongor soum, Omnogobi aimag	Skull	G. Dashzeveg
	4250	1988	Khuvkhuljin Well, Mandakh Brigade, Khankhongor soum, Omnogobi aimag	Skull	G. Dashzeveg
	None	12 October 1999	Zagt Gobi, 20 km south of Khuvsgul soum, Dornogobi aimag	Skull	Z. Namshir
	None	18 October 2003	Tsagaan Buraa, Tes soum, Uvs aimag	Pelt & skull	D. Togtokhbayar
	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	2 pelts	Unknown
<i>Mongolian Natural History Museum</i>					
	None	1950	Unknown	Pelt	Eregdendagva
<i>Museum of Uvs Strictly Protected Area</i>					
	None	19 March 2003	First Brigade, Tes soum, Uvs aimag	Pelt & skull	D. Togtokhbayar
<i>Museum of Khustai Nuruu National Park</i>					
	None	Not indicated	Tuul River valley, Altanbulag soum, Tuv aimag	Pelt & skull	D. Usukhjargal
<i>Department of Zoology, Mongolian National University</i>					
	None	2 December 2002	Bachaa, Tsetseg, soum, Khovd aimag	Pelt & skull	S. Shar & D. Jambalsuren



Fig. 3. Marbled Polecat specimen housed in the collection of Uvs aimag Strictly Protected Area museum (Photo: S. Dulamtseren).

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- <sup>1</sup>**Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Mongolia.**
- <sup>2</sup>**Department of Zoology, National University of Mongolia, Mongolia.**
- <sup>3</sup>**Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, University of Oxford, United Kingdom.**
- <sup>4</sup>**Conservation Biology Department, Denver Zoological Foundation, U.S.A.**
- <sup>5</sup>**University the Eco-Asia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.**
- <sup>6</sup>**Hustai National Park, Mongolia.**
- <sup>7</sup>**Mongolian Conservation Coalition & Denver Zoological Foundation, Mongolia.**
- \*Corresponding author: 2300 Steele St., Denver, CO 80205 U.S.A.; +1 303-376-4945; Email: rreading@denverzoo.org**