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Ictonyx striatus.

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Ictonyx Kaup, 1835

Bradypus Perry, 1810:(unpaged; in signature YT). Type species *Bradypus striatus.*

Zorilla Oken, 1816:volume 3, part 2:xi. Ruled unavailable by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature Opinion 417.

Zorilla I. Geoffroy, 1826:215. Suppressed by the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature Opinion 818.

Mephitis A. Smith, 1826:20. Vide Rosevear (1974:95).

Mustela J. B. Fischer, 1829:218.

Ictonyx Kaup, 1835:352. Renaming of *Bradypus striatus* Perry.

Rhabdogale Weigmann, 1838:278. Renaming of *Bradypus striatus* Perry.

Ictidonyx Agassiz, 1848:558. An emendation of *Ictonyx* Kaup.

Ictomys Roberts, 1936:228. A lapsus calami for *Ictonyx*.

CONTEXT AND CONTENT. Order Carnivora, family Mustelidae, subfamily Mustelinae. The taxonomy of this genus is controversial: *Poecilictis,* a sister genus, often is considered under *Ictonyx.* The number of species included in *Ictonyx* is also controversial. In the past, as few as 1 (Ellerman et al. 1953) and as many as 3 (Shortridge 1934) or 4 (Roberts 1951) species were recognized. Recent reviews consider either 1 (Nowak 1999) or 2 (Wozencraft 1993) species of *Ictonyx.* Nowak (1999) considers *I. lybica* under *Poecilictis.* Herein, 2 species of *Ictonyx* are recognized: *I. libyca* and *I. striatus* (Wozencraft 1993).

Ictonyx striatus (Perry, 1810)

Zorilla

Bradypus striatus Perry, 1810:41. Type locality "South America." Fixed as "the Cape," South Africa by Hollister 1915.

Mephitis capensis A. Smith, 1826:20. No locality given, vide Rosevear (1974:95); "Cape of Good Hope," vide Roberts (1951: 205).

Mustela zorilla J. B. Fischer, 1829:218–219. Type locality "Senegalia."

Mustela zorilla Smuts, 1832:12. Not *Viverra zorilla* Schreber (= *Spilogale*).

Putorius zorilla A. Smith, 1834. Vide Roberts (1951:205).

Ictonyx capensis Kaup, 1835:352. Renaming of *Bradypus striatus* Perry.

Mephitis africana Lichtenstein, 1836:284. Type locality not given.

Rhabdogale mustelina Wagner, 1841:219. Type locality "Cape of Good Hope."

Zorilla striata Layard, 1861:28. Name attributed to Gray.

Ictonyx striatus Hollister, 1915:184. First use of current name combination.

Ictonyx limpopoensis Roberts, 1917:265. Type locality "Mooivlei, Rustenburg district (western Transvaal)."

Ictonyx orangiae Roberts, 1924:67. Type locality "Angra Pequina, south of Bothaville, north-western Orange Free State."

Ictonyx kalaharicus Roberts, 1932:8. Type locality "Kuke Pan, central Kalahari, Bechuanaland."

CONTEXT AND CONTENT. Content same as for genus. Two synonyms (*Viverra zorilla* Erxleben and *Zorilla capensis* Waterhouse) given by Layard (1861) could not be traced and may refer to *Spilogale.* Most of the 22 described subspecies (Kingdon 1997) can be combined under 3 geographic groupings (Coetzee 1977; Kingdon 1977): *I. s. striatus* (southern Africa), *I. s. erythrae* (northeastern and eastern Africa), and *I. s. senegalensis* (western Africa). However, the subspecies are probably invalid (Coetzee 1977; Ellerman et al. 1953; Skinner and Smithers 1990; Smithers 1971), and cannot be distinguished (Dorst and Dandelot 1970). Furthermore, the range of each subspecies is unknown (Pringle 1977). Pending a revision of subspecies, none are recognized (Smithers 1971).

DIAGNOSIS. *Ictonyx striatus* is larger (ca. 1.5 kg) than the striped weasel, *Poecilogale albinucha,* and is more skunk-like, whereas *P. albinucha* is smaller (<500 g), more elongated, has shorter legs, and is more weasel-like. Furthermore, the striped weasel has 4 well-defined white stripes on the back, whereas *I. striatus* has both stripes and spots, especially in the head and neck region (Kingdon 1997). In North Africa, *I. striatus* is sympatric with *I. libyca;* the latter is smaller (ca. 1 kg) and has a whiter coat and less defined white lines on the back (Kingdon 1997; Nowak 1999).

GENERAL CHARACTERS. The zorilla (Fig. 1) is black with a white spot on the forehead and 2 white patches on the cheeks. A broad white band on the back of the head splits into 4 white stripes continuing to the tail. Tail is black and white above and fully white at tip (Estes 1991; Smithers 1966). Ears have a white fringe (Smithers 1966).

Venter and limbs are black. Pelage is long and silky on back. Hair length is 6–7 mm on head and 50–60 mm on hindquarters (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Tail hairs reach 70–80 mm (Skinner and Smithers 1990).

Soles of feet are naked and each foot has 5 digits. Claws on forefeet are long and curved and ca. 18 mm in length. Claws on hind feet are shorter and straighter and ca. 10 mm in length (Skinner and Smithers 1990). All 5 digits and claw prints appear in the tracks (Skinner and Smithers 1990).

In South Africa, measurements (in mm) of 35 males and 14 females average (±*SD*), respectively: length of head and body, 338.5 ± 25.6, 308.3 ± 27.5; and length of tail, 249 ± 29, 250 ± 29 (Roberts 1951). Average (in mm; range in parentheses) of 3 males and 3 females, respectively, from KwaZulu-Natal (Rowe-Rowe 1978a) were: length of head and body, 365 (350–380), 331 (320–340); length of tail, 205 (165–245), 206 (199–210); length of hind foot, 55 (50–59), 54 (50–59); and length of ear, 27 (25–30), 27 (26–29). The same measurements (in mm; range and sample

FIG. 1. Adult *Ictonyx striatus.* Photograph courtesy of David T. Rowe-Rowe.

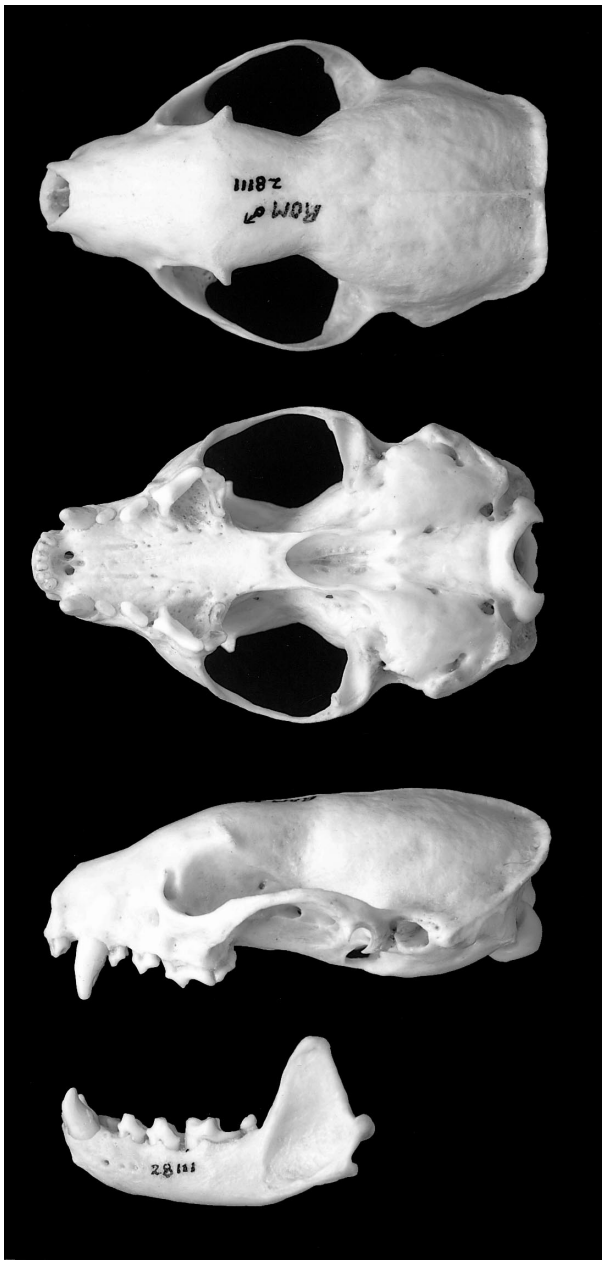

FIG. 2. Dorsal, ventral, and lateral views of cranium and lateral view of mandible of *Ictonyx striatus* (Royal Ontario Museum, #28111). Greatest length of cranium is 69.1 mm.

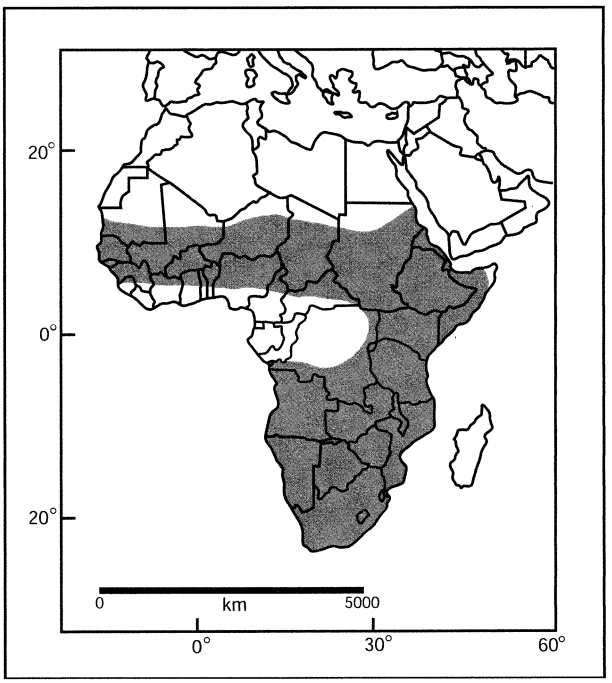

FIG. 3. Distribution of *Ictonyx striatus* in Africa, modified from Estes (1991), Kingdon (1997), and Rowe-Rowe (1992).

size in parentheses) for males and females, respectively, from the Cape Province (Stuart 1981) were: length of head and body, 340 (280–380, 30), 331 (290–365, 8); length of tail, 207 (165–255, 32), 191 (175–200, 10); length of hind foot, 54 (47–66, 28), 49 (44–53, 10); and length of ear, 28 (22–34, 32), 25 (20–30, 10). Measurements (in mm) of 46 males and 17 females, respectively, from Zimbabwe and Bostwana (Smithers 1971, 1983), averaged (range in parentheses): total length, 616 (485–680), 601 (559–633); length of tail, 257 (210–295), 257 (247–268); length of hind foot, 63 (56–75), 57 (50–64); and length of ear, 30 (24–36), 29 (26–31). In southwest Africa (Namibia), these dimensions (in mm) for males and females, respectively (Shortridge 1934), averaged (range and sample size in parentheses): total length, 603 (548–675, 14), 605 (550–640, 4); length of tail, 259 (210–290, 15), 271 (210–305, 6); length of hind foot, 59 (52–65, 15), 53 (49–59, 9); and length of ear, 30 (29–34, 14), 28 (26–31, 8).

Males are ca. 50% heavier than females (Rowe-Rowe 1978a). Body mass (in g) of 5 captive males averaged ca. 1,150 (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Body mass (in g) of 5 males and 6 females from KwaZulu-Natal averaged (range) 990 (800–1,200) and 637 (420–750), respectively (Rowe-Rowe 1978a). The average body mass (in g) of zorillas from the Cape Province (Stuart 1981) were 793 (n = 21, range 486–1,200) for males and 576 for females (n = 4, range 428–700). Body mass (in g) of 27 males and 8 females from Zimbabwe and Botswana averaged (range) 974 (681–1,460) and 713 (596–880), respectively (Smithers 1983). Body mass (in g) of 14 males and 8 females from Botswana (Smithers 1971) averaged (range) 900 (680–1,360) and 625 (480–790), respectively.

Skull is heavily built (Fig. 2). Braincase is broad posteriorly and tapers anteriorly, and rostrum is short and blunt. A well-defined sagittal crest is absent, and 2 low ridges run from center of supraoccipital crest to postorbital processes, giving an extra attachment for temporalis muscles (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Hamular process of pterygoid is greatly extended posteriorly and fuses with anteroventral surface of auditory bullae (Bryant et al. 1993). Palate is broad posteriorly and narrows behind molar teeth (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Auditory bullae are broad and flat, tapering anteriorly to a narrow point. Zygomatic arches are broad and strong at their base, but thin and weak centrally. Postorbital processes are reduced to small knobs (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Measurements (in mm) from 4 specimens (sex unknown) from Botswana (Smithers 1971) average (range): greatest length of skull, 71.7 (71.0–72.2) and width of braincase, 32.5 (30–34). Greatest length of skull (in mm) for 9 males and 3 females from the Cape Province, South Africa averaged (range): 62 (61–65) and 60 (59–61), respectively (Stuart 1981). In South Africa, measurements (in mm) for 39 males and 14 females average (±*SD*), respectively: greatest length of skull: 66.2 ± 6.1, 61.5 ± 3.3; and zygomatic breadth, 41.2 ± 3.4, 36.3 ± 3.4 (Roberts 1951).

DISTRIBUTION. *Ictonyx striatus* is present across most of South Africa and meridional Africa excluding the Congo basin, the Guinea zone, the forests of West Africa, the arid lands of northeast Somalia, and adjacent areas in Ethiopia (Fig. 3; Avenant 1997; Crawford-Cabral 1989; Du Toit 1980; Pringle 1977; Rowe-Rowe 1992; Skinner and Smithers 1990).

FOSSIL RECORD. Coues (1877) considered *Ictonyx* as the Old World representative closest to the Mephitinae (now Mephitidae—Dragoo and Honeycutt 1997). Alternatively, phylogenetic analyses placed *Ictonyx* as either sister to the Lutrinae, or outside a clade containing Lutrinae and the genus *Mustela* (Dragoo and Honeycutt 1997). The placement of *Ictonyx* within the Mustelidae is obscure (Dragoo and Honeycutt 1997).

Ictonyx striatus resembles the larger but extinct Baranya polecat (*Baranogale antiqua*); this species was common during the Early and Middle Pleistocene in Europe (Kurtén 1968). Most likely, the genera *Ictonyx*, *Baranogale*, and *Vormela* evolved from a common ancestor during the latter part of the Tertiary (Kurtén 1968). Fossils of zorillas are reported from the Pleistocene in Hopefield, South Africa (Hendey 1974; Savage 1978). Closest living relatives of *I. striatus* are *I. libyca* and the marbled polecat, *Vormela peregusna* (Bryant et al. 1993).

FORM AND FUNCTION. *Ictonyx striatus* has long and curved claws for digging and removing small prey from soil or crevices (Kingdon 1977; Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Teeth of *I. striatus* are less sharp and pointed than those of *P. albinucha*, suggesting a less exclusive carnivore diet (Kingdon 1977). The M1 is broad, and occludes on the rear portion of m1 and front portion of m2, providing surfaces for crushing and grinding (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Dental formula is i 3/3, c 1/1, p 3/3, m 1/2, total 34 (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Dentition of the zorilla includes crushing surfaces between M1 in the upper, and m1 and m2 in the lower jaw. This suggests that *I. striatus* is more versatile in its diet and more widely distributed than the more specialized striped weasel (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Captive zorillas maintained their body mass when consuming ca. 16% of their body mass per day in day-old chicks (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Zorillas have gut lengths ca. 3.2–4.3 times the length of their head and body. Food passage is ca. 165 min (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Droppings have ca. 8.3% of the mass of food ingested (for chicken and rodent diets—Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Zorillas drink by lapping (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Baculum is thin and slightly curved, diminishing in diameter distally. A large but shallow urethral groove is present on ventral side. Length of 1 baculum was 55 mm (Chaîne 1925).

Black and white fur acts as warning coloration that remains conspicuous even at night (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Scent from anal glands is less pungent than that of American skunks (Shortridge 1934). Albinism may occur (Shortridge 1934).

ONTOGENY AND REPRODUCTION. Young are born in spring or summer after a gestation of 36 days (Rowe-Rowe 1978c). Neonates are blind, pink, and hairless, and color patterns appear after 1 week (Rowe-Rowe 1978a). Eyes open after 40 days and young start to eat solid food at ca. 33 days when their canine teeth erupt. At 9 weeks of age, young are able to kill mice. Adult size is reached after 20 weeks (Rowe-Rowe 1978c). Females have 1 litter per year, but may breed again if the first litter is lost early (Rowe-Rowe 1978c). Litter size is 2–3 (Shortridge 1934). Copulation lasts 60–100 min (Rowe-Rowe 1978c).

ECOLOGY. The zorilla is highly adaptable and inhabits a wide variety of habitats, including mountains, sand plains, forest, swamps, riverine woodlands, floodplains, grasslands, coastal hummocks, and town gardens (Shortridge 1934; Smithers 1971). Sex ratios (male:female) of zorillas was 2.1:1 in Botswana (Smithers 1971), 1.6:1 in KwaZulu-Natal (Rowe-Rowe 1992), and 3.3:1 in the Cape province (Stuart 1981). Male biased sex ratios may be caused by the greater activity of males (Lockie 1966).

Zorillas feed mostly on insects and small rodents, but birds and their eggs, reptiles, and invertebrates are also a part of their diet. Occasionally, they may eat carrion (Shortridge 1934) and eat insects dug from cattle dung (Kingdon 1977). In South Africa, percent occurrence in 21 stomachs was 62% insects, 38% mammals, 10% birds, 10% arachnids, 5% frogs, and 5% myriapods (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Volume of stomach contents average 14.6 ml (range, 0–39 ml). Seven of 29 stomachs from zorillas in the Cape Province were empty; the animals in the remaining stomachs were: birds in 5, mammals in 3, reptiles in 1, Coleoptera in 8, Coleoptera larvae in 6, Orthoptera in 6, Lepidoptera in 1, and Diptera in 1 (Stuart 1981). One stomach of a zorilla from Kalahari National Park, South Africa, contained mostly reptile remains (Viljoen and Davis 1973). In Botswana, 12 zorilla stomachs contained insects, 5 had reptiles, and 4 had small mammals (Smithers 1971).

In captivity, zorillas ate all animal foods presented to them except snails and slugs (Molluscs), millipedes (Myriapods), toads (*Bufo*,) and crabs (*Potamonautes*—Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Captive zorillas preferred insects, rodents, reptiles, amphibians, and birds (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Invertebrates consumed by captive zorillas included earthworms (Annelids), cockroaches (Blattidae), mantids (Mantidae), grasshoppers (Acrididae), crickets (Gryllidae), winged termites (Isoptera), caterpillars (Lepidoptera), and beetles and their larvae (Coleoptera—Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Insects that exude an unpleasant tasting liquid or odor were not eaten by captive zorillas (Rowe-Rowe 1978c), but shrews (*Crocidura*) were consumed (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). All reptiles presented (chameleon, *Chamaeleo dilepis*; striped skink, *Mabuya striata*; red-lipped snake, *Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*; olive house snake, *Lamprophis inortatus*; and spotted bush snake, *Philothamnus semivariegatus*) were killed and eaten (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). None of the plant foods offered were consumed (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Zorillas may compete for food with mongooses (*Mungos*, *Herpestes*, *Ichneumia*) or genets (*Genetta*). However, zorillas likely consume more mammals, birds, and insects than other sympatric carnivores (Kingdon 1977). Competition between *I. striatus* and *P. albinucha* is probably lessened by the more adaptable habits of the zorilla, the more diverse diet (Rowe-Rowe 1978b), and by the different hunting methods (*Ictonyx* hunts small rodents aboveground, whereas *Poecilogale* may follow rodents into their burrows). Little evidence of competition exists, but where both species occur, striped weasels may be less common (Kingdon 1977).

Zorillas host 2 nematode endoparasites: *Filaria martis* and *Hepatofilaria pachycephalum* (Round 1968). Four of 21 stomachs examined in KwaZulu-Natal contained nematodes, although none were identified (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Sporadic cases of rabies may occur (Adamson 1954; Thomas and Neitz 1936).

Longevity in the wild is 4–5 years (Rowe-Rowe 1992). In captivity, zorillas may live >13 years (Jones 1982). Most mortality is from domestic dogs or motor vehicles (Kingdon 1977). One case of predation by brown hyenas (*Hyena brunnea*) is reported (Mills 1990). Some zorillas are killed for preying on poultry (Rowe-Rowe 1992).

Zorillas are easy to catch with fresh meat bait and uncovered traps (Shortridge 1934). They can be tamed easily, even when captured as adults (Shortridge 1934). Sometimes they are kept as pets after anal glands are surgically removed (Kingdon 1977). Scent is used as perfume (Shortridge 1934).

BEHAVIOR. Zorillas generally are solitary, but pairs may occur. Larger groups are rare, and usually comprise 1 female and her young (Rowe-Rowe 1992). Adult males and females are together only during mating, and adult males are intolerant of other males (Rowe-Rowe 1996).

Zorillas are entirely nocturnal (Shortridge 1934; Smithers 1971). During the day, they rest in rock crevices, hollow logs, burrows, or under buildings (Shortridge 1934; Smithers 1971; Stuart 1981). One animal rested between 2 branches 3 m up a tree (Shortridge 1934). Zorillas can dig their own burrows, but often use burrows dug by other animals (Shortridge 1934; Skinner and Smithers 1990). Unless disturbed, females exhibit site fidelity to burrows where young are born and raised (Kingdon 1977). Zorillas swim easily (Shortridge 1934).

Most prey are detected by sight or smell and captured after stalking or short chases (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). When foraging, zorillas often bob their heads (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). They often dig out holes of rodents (Shortridge 1934). Larger mammals, such as ground squirrels (*Xerus*) and springhares (*Petedes capensis*), are followed to their burrows and killed (Shortridge 1934).

Ictonyx striatus often hunts for invertebrates in loose soil, plant debris, and at the base of grass tufts. Typically, *I. striatus* pushes its nose into loose soil and sniffs audibly (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). When food is detected, it is excavated with forefeet. Slow prey are bitten directly, whereas faster moving prey, such as moths, mantids, or beetles may either be bitten or pinned to the ground with a forefoot and eaten head first. In captivity, zorillas never attempted to capture flying insects in the air. All parts of insects are eaten (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Rats (*Rattus*) are located mainly by sight. On occasion, rats are stalked and quickly captured or are chased. They are captured either by direct biting or by being pinned to the ground with the forefeet and then bitten. Most killing bites are directed at back of neck, head, or chest (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Rats larger than 140 g usually require more bites and pinning with the forefeet. Occasionally, zorillas roll while biting. In captivity, almost all prey were carried back to and consumed at the nest box (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). *Ictonyx* usually carries prey in its mouth, but large prey may be dragged while going backwards (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Large rats are eaten by biting at the flesh and holding the skin with the forefeet. This way, the rat is skinned and all that remains is the head, large bones, feet, and skin. Only large animals whose skulls cannot be crushed are skinned and eaten (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Birds presented to captive zorillas are quickly and easily killed by a bite at the head. Birds are eaten headfirst. Zorillas will consume young birds completely, but they leave most of the feathers, feet, and tibia of mature birds (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Contents of broken eggs are consumed, but captive zorillas experience initial difficulty and low interest in unbroken eggs. Eventually, animals learn to open them by biting or rolling the egg against a hard object such as a rock. Once cracked, the egg is easily opened and consumed (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Zorillas often kill snakes (Smithers 1966) and will attack large cobras (Shortridge 1934). Nonvenemous snakes are approached cautiously and bitten on the back several times, after which zorillas retreat rapidly. Each bite is directed to the posterior half of the snake and is accompanied by vigorous shaking. After 4–5 such attacks, the zorilla pins the snake to the ground with the forefeet, and repeatedly bites 10–15 cm from the head. Some of the bites involve vigorous shaking (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Lizards are captured following short chases, pinned to the ground with the forefeet, and killed by a bite at the head. Lizards are entirely consumed and eaten head first (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Red-lipped snakes are approached and killed differently, most likely because of their defensive behavior. Upon being approached by the zorilla, snakes typically coil and strike. Zorillas avoid the strike by retreating swiftly. Eventually, the snake stops striking and tries to move away. Then, zorillas use a technique similar to that used for other snakes: several bites on the posterior half of the snake, quick retreats, and finally pinning with forefeet and biting the head (Rowe-Rowe 1978b). Most snakes are eaten head first, but occasionally tail or even flanks may be consumed first (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Amphibians are killed by pinning to the ground with forefeet and biting head and neck region. All parts of amphibians are eaten (Rowe-Rowe 1978b).

Zorillas make no effort to hide when foraging (Kingdon 1977). Gait is very similar to that of North American skunks; pace usually is a slow trot with back slightly arched (Shortridge 1934). During normal activities, tail is carried horizontally in line with body (Shortridge 1934; Smithers 1971).

When disturbed, zorillas may escape by running into a burrow (Stuart 1981). When escape is not possible, *Ictonyx* presents itself broadside (Rowe-Rowe 1978a) and tail is raised or curled over back. Zorillas also may emit shrill squeals (Shortridge 1934). Further disturbance will cause zorillas to turn their hindquarters to the aggressor while looking over at the aggressor. Further aggression leads to excretion by the zorilla of pungent liquid from anal glands (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Occasionally, zorillas may feign death for >30 min (Kingdon 1977; Shortridge 1934; Smithers 1966). Although usually terrestrial, under stress they may climb trees (Fitzsimmons 1919).

Zorillas emit 6 different calls: 2 threat calls, 2 defense calls, 1 greeting call, and 1 mating call. In addition, young zorillas produce 3 calls (Channing and Rowe-Rowe 1977).

Threat calls of *Ictonyx* consist of a warning call emitted when another animal approaches either their food or young, or when an intruder approaches. If the warning call fails to repel the intruder, then an aggression call is emitted. Aggression calls often occur before physical fighting. Defense calls are used as either submission or release calls. Submission calls are emitted during early stages of displaying if an animal recognizes that the other animal is dominant. Nonreceptive females use it when males attempt to mount and copulate. Young also terminate play with this call. Release calls are used by the losing male at the end of a male–male fight, and by any adult either held in a trap or cornered (Channing and Rowe-Rowe 1977).

A greeting call of *I. striatus* occurs but was not tape-recorded in captivity (Channing and Rowe-Rowe 1977). Finally, female zorillas utter a mating call almost continually during copulation. Three variations of this call have been recorded, and sonographs are available (Channing and Rowe-Rowe 1977).

Juvenile zorillas emit 3 calls: a distress call, used from birth until 2.5 weeks of age when the young is separated from the mother; a contact call, used by blind young when the mother reenters the nest and prior to nursing; and a distress call used by juveniles >2.5 weeks of age. This third call is used for 2–4 weeks following opening of the eyes (Channing and Rowe-Rowe 1977).

CONSERVATION STATUS. *Ictonyx striatus* is not listed in the South African Red Data Book or on any of the appendices of the Commission for the International Trade of Endangered Species. The species is not protected outside reserves in KwaZulu-Natal (Rowe-Rowe 1992), and its status elsewhere is unknown. Increased human populations and presence of freely roaming dogs may threaten zorilla populations in some areas (Rowe-Rowe 1992). Nothing is known of the genetics of *I. striatus*.

REMARKS. The ethymological origin of *Ictonyx* is the Greek *ict* meaning marten or weasel and *onyx* meaning claw or nail (Borror 1960). The specific name *striatus* is from the Latin *stria* meaning streaked (Borror 1960). Other vernacular names include African skunk, striped muishond, African muishond, striped weasel, striped polecat, iQaqa (Zulu and Xhosa), nakedi (Tswana), kicheche (Kiswahili), stinkmuishond (Afrikaans), band-iltis (German), zorille commun (French), and moufette africaine (French).

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