



# A synthesis of African and western Indian Ocean Island mammal taxa (Class: Mammalia) described between 1988 and 2008: an update to Allen (1939) and Ansell (1989)

MICHAEL HOFFMANN<sup>1,2,9</sup>, PETER GRUBB<sup>3</sup>, COLIN P. GROVES<sup>4</sup>, RAINER HUTTERER<sup>5</sup>,  
ERIK VAN DER STRAETEN<sup>6</sup>, NANCY SIMMONS<sup>7</sup> & WIM BERGMANS<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>IUCN/SSC - CI/CABS Biodiversity Assessment Unit, c/o Center for Applied Biodiversity Science, Conservation International, 2011 Crystal Drive, Suite 500, Arlington, VA 22202, USA. E-mail: m.hoffmann@conservation.org

<sup>2</sup>IUCN Species Programme, IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature, Rue Mauverney, 1196 Gland, Switzerland  
<sup>3</sup>35 Downhills Park Rd, London N17 6PE, United Kingdom (deceased)

<sup>4</sup>School of Archaeology and Anthropology, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia.  
E-mail: colin.groves@anu.edu.au

<sup>5</sup>Zoologisches Forschungsmuseum Alexander Koenig, Section of Mammals, Adenauerallee 160, D-53113 Bonn, Germany.  
E-mail: r.hutterer.zfmk@uni-bonn.de

<sup>6</sup>Kerkstraat 90, 7655 Wellington, South Africa. E-mail: erik.vanderstraeten@antwerpen.be

<sup>7</sup>Chairman, Division of Vertebrate Zoology, Curator-in-Charge, Department of Mammalogy, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, NY 10024, USA. E-mail: simmons@amnh.org

<sup>8</sup>Zoologisch Museum, Mauritskade 61, Postbus 94766, 1090 GT Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: w.bergmans@uva.nl

<sup>9</sup>Corresponding author

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## Abstract

We provide a synthesis of all mammal taxa described from the African mainland, Madagascar and all surrounding islands in the 20 years since 1988, thereby supplementing the earlier works of G.M. Allen (1939) and W.F.H. Ansell (1989), and bringing the list of African mammals described over the last 250 years current to December 2008. We list 175 new extant taxa, including five new genera, one new subgenus, 138 new species and 31 new subspecies, including remarks, where relevant, on the current systematic position of each taxon. Names of seven species of primates are emended, according to the requirements of the ICZN. The taxonomic group in which the largest number of new taxa has been described is the Primates, with two new genera, 47 new species and 11 new subspecies, while geographically the biggest increase in new species descriptions has been on the island of Madagascar, accounting for roughly half (67) of all new species described in the past 20 years. Nearly half of all new species listed currently are assessed as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (49 of 101 listed species) suggesting further research is urgently needed to help clarify the status of those recently described species.

**Key words:** African mammals; species description; taxonomy

## Introduction

The most recent classification of mammals recognizes 5,416 species in 1,229 genera (Wilson & Reeder 2005). An average of 223 new valid species have been described per decade since the birth of modern taxonomic nomenclature in 1758, and this rate is increasing. Between mid-1992, when the second edition of *Mammal Species of the World* (Wilson & Reeder 1993) was going to press, and mid-2006, 341 new living mammal species were described—a rate of 24+ new descriptions per year (Reeder *et al.* 2007).

Glover M. Allen provided the names of Recent African mammal taxa in his landmark *A Checklist of African Mammals* published in 1939. This work listed all African mammals described from the starting point of zoological nomenclature (Linnaeus in 1758) to July 1938, and has been the foundation for subsequent taxonomic treatises on African mammals (e.g. Ellerman *et al.* 1953; Meester & Setzer 1971–1977; Meester *et al.* 1986). Over the 50 years following the issue of Allen's *Checklist*, substantial advances were made in the study of African mammals and many new taxa were described. A revision of Allen's list became necessary, and Frank Ansell, a veteran authority on African mammals (e.g. Ansell 1960, 1978; Ansell & Dowsett 1988) assumed responsibility for undertaking an update of Allen's list. In 1989, he published an extension to Allen's tome, entitled *African Mammals: 1938–1988* (Ansell 1989), which provided information on mammal taxa described between the completion of Allen's work in July 1938 and 31st December 1988—just over half a century—and included a number of names omitted from Allen's earlier synthesis.

The last two decades have been a very exciting period for Afrotropical mammalogy. The region continues to enjoy the attention of much regional and international research. An increasing number of countries that