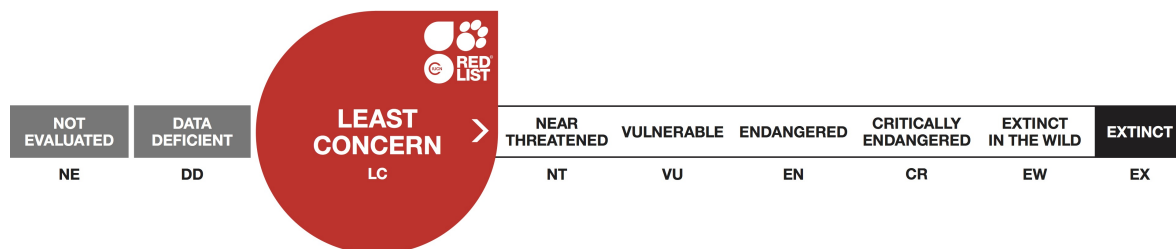


Mustela nivalis, Least Weasel

Amended version

Assessment by: McDonald, R.A., Abramov, A.V., Stubbe, M., Herrero, J., Maran, T., Tikhonov, A., Cavallini, P., Kranz, A., Giannatos, G., Kryštufek, B. & Reid, F.



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Taxonomy

| Kingdom | Phylum | Class | Order | Family |
|----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Animalia | Chordata | Mammalia | Carnivora | Mustelidae |

Taxon Name: *Mustela nivalis* Linnaeus, 1766

Regional Assessments:

- Mediterranean
- Europe

Common Name(s):

- English: Least Weasel, Weasel
- French: Belette d'Europe
- Spanish: Comadreja

Taxonomic Notes:

The taxonomy of Least Weasel *Mustela nivalis* was reviewed by Abramov and Baryshnikov (2000), who considered Egyptian Weasel *M. subpamata* to be a distinct species, a treatment followed here. Tonkin Weasel *M. tonkinensis* and Sichuan Weasel *M. russelliana*, here treated as distinct species following Groves (2007), were included as part of *M. nivalis* by Abramov and Baryshnikov (2000) (and in previous versions of its Red List assessment). A weasel population found in Taiwan in the late 20th century and considered by its finders to be a new species allied to Stoat *M. erminea* is here considered, following Abramov (2006) to be part of *M. nivalis*.

Assessment Information

Red List Category & Criteria: Least Concern [ver 3.1](#)

Year Published: 2019

Date Assessed: May 2, 2015

Justification:

This species is listed as Least Concern in view of its wide distribution, presumed large population, occurrence in a number of protected areas, tolerance to some degree of habitat modification, and because it is unlikely to be declining at nearly the rate required to qualify for listing in a threatened category or even as Near Threatened.

Previously Published Red List Assessments

2016 – Least Concern (LC)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-1.RLTS.T70207409A45200499.en>

Geographic Range

Range Description:

Least Weasel has a circumboreal Holarctic distribution, taking in much of Europe, northern Asia and

northern North America (Sheffield and King 1994, Abramov and Baryshnikov 2000). It is found almost throughout Europe, including on Britain (but not Ireland). In mainland Asia it ranges south to northern Mongolia (Bannikov 1954, Dulamtseren 1970), Korea (not just northernmost, where indicated by Won and Smith (1999), but also in southern parts; Abramov and Baryshnikov 2000), and northern China (Nei Mongol, Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning, Hebei and Xinjiang provinces; Wang 2003). Populations further south are not here considered conspecific; see 'Taxonomic notes'. Further west in Asia it occurs south to Lebanon, Iran and Afghanistan (Abramov and Baryshnikov 2000, Habibi 2004). It is also found on Honshu, Hokkaido, Kunashiri and Etorofu islands in Japan (Abe *et al.* 2005), on Sakhalin and the Kuril islands in Russia (Abramov and Baryshnikov 2000), and on Taiwan (Abramov 2006). In North Africa it is confined to Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia; these populations have typically been considered native, but it is not impossible that they were introduced (Lebarbenchon *et al.* 2010). It has been introduced to many Mediterranean islands, the Azores Islands, Sao Tome off West Africa, and New Zealand (Sheffield and King 1994, Dobson 1998, Lebarbenchon *et al.* 2010). Statements that it occurs or occurred in Israel lack any credible basis (Werner 2012).

This species occurs from sea level up to at least 3,860 m.

Country Occurrence:

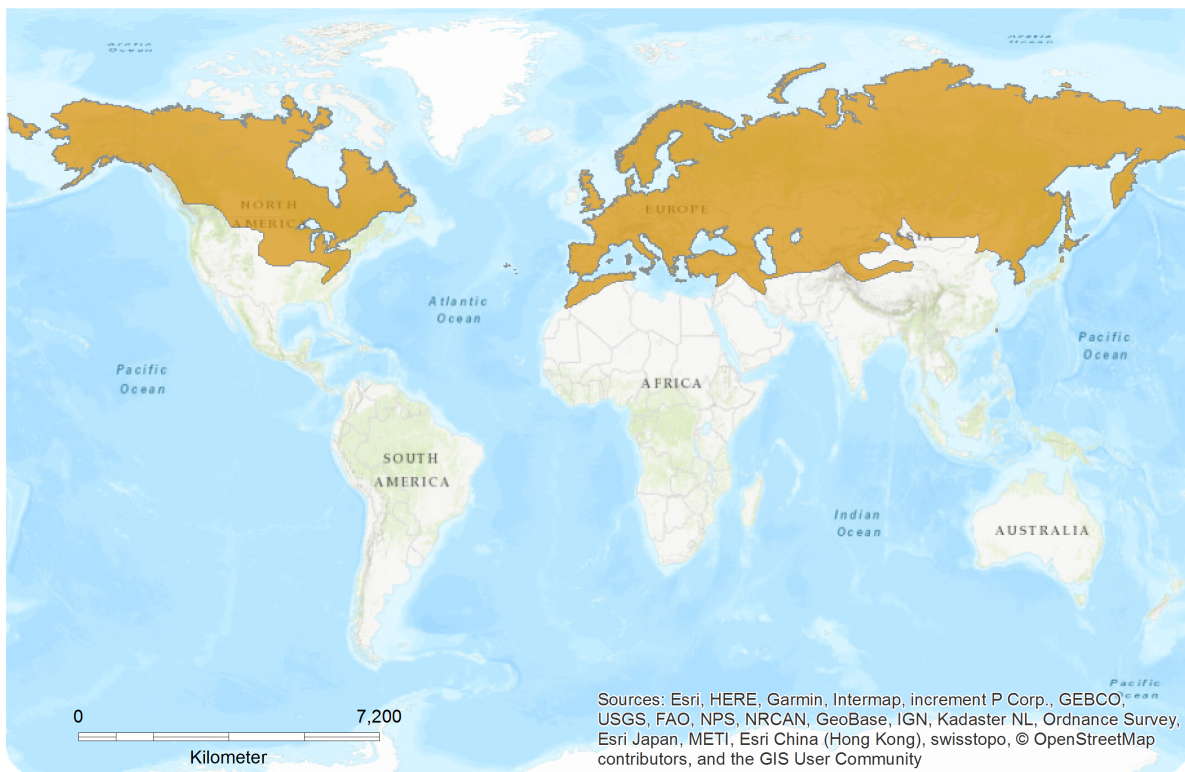
Native: Afghanistan; Albania; Andorra; Armenia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Belgium; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bulgaria; Canada; China; Croatia; Czechia; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Georgia; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Iran, Islamic Republic of; Italy; Japan; Kazakhstan; Korea, Democratic People's Republic of; Korea, Republic of; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Lebanon; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Moldova; Monaco; Mongolia; Montenegro; Netherlands; North Macedonia; Norway; Poland; Portugal (Azores - Introduced, Portugal (mainland)); Romania; Russian Federation; San Marino; Serbia; Slovakia; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; Syrian Arab Republic; Taiwan, Province of China; Tajikistan; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Ukraine; United Kingdom; United States; Uzbekistan

Introduced: New Zealand; Sao Tome and Principe (São Tomé)

Present - origin uncertain: Algeria; Malta; Morocco

Distribution Map

Mustela nivalis

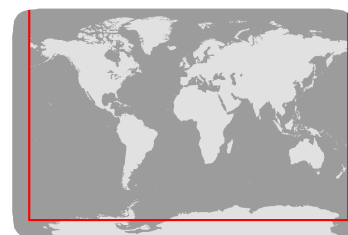


Range

- Extant & Introduced (resident)
- Extant & Origin Uncertain (resident)
- Extant (resident)

Compiled by:

IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply any official endorsement, acceptance or opinion by IUCN.



Population

In the European part of its range, there are documented population declines in some areas (e.g., Britain: Battersby 2005), and suspected declines in others. Although it has a wide distribution, it is considered rare in North America (Sheffield and King 1994). In Eurasia, it is relatively common, but not often seen (Sheffield and King 1994). Local densities of 0.2 to 1.0 individuals per hectare can occur in favoured habitats when prey are abundant (Sheffield and King 1994). However, over wider areas, the average density may be as low as one to seven per 100 hectares (Goszczyński 1977). Populations fluctuate both seasonally and annually, sometimes involving large increases of up to 10-fold, concurrently or within nine months of a population peak of small rodents, and lasting six to 18 months (Sheffield and King 1994). It is often thought to be rare (although sometimes locally fairly common) throughout its range in south-eastern U.S.A., but its actual status there is uncertain (Handley 1991).

Current Population Trend: Stable

Habitat and Ecology (see Appendix for additional information)

Least Weasel tolerates a wide range of habitats, including forest, farmland and cultivated fields, grassy fields and meadows, riparian woodland, hedgerows, alpine meadows and forest, scrub, steppe, semi-desert, prairies, and coastal dunes (Sheffield and King 1994, Pulliainen 1999). It forms dens in crevices among tree roots, in hollow logs, or in abandoned burrows of other species. This species is a specialist diurnal predator of small mammals (especially rodents), although it will also occasionally feed on birds' eggs, lizards, frogs, salamanders, fish, worms, and carrion (Sheffield and King 1994). Food may be stored for the winter (Danzig 1992). Habitat selection is usually determined by local distribution of rodents. When foraging it avoids open spaces, where it is most vulnerable to predation by raptors (Sheffield and King 1994). It prefers dense, rank grassland where microtines (voles and lemmings) are abundant (R. McDonald pers. comm. 2006).

Systems: Terrestrial

Use and Trade

In historical times, Least Weasel was used as a house animal (to preserve food from small rodents; Masseti 1995) as well as for food, fur and even traditional medicine, as is still the case in Morocco (Lebarbenchon *et al.* 2010).

Threats (see Appendix for additional information)

Threats include incidental poisoning with rodenticides (Sheffield and King 1994) and persecution. Least Weasel prefers open agricultural habitats, which are declining owing to changes in agricultural practices (rural abandonment) in parts of Europe, as open fields undergo succession.

Conservation Actions (see Appendix for additional information)

This species is found in many protected areas. It is listed on Appendix III of the Bern Convention (Pulliainen 1999), and is protected under national and sub-national legislation in a number of range states. Present levels of monitoring are insufficient to quantify the population trend in Europe.

Credits

Assessor(s): McDonald, R.A., Abramov, A.V., Stubbe, M., Herrero, J., Maran, T., Tikhonov, A., Cavallini, P., Kranz, A., Giannatos, G., Kryštufek, B. & Reid, F.

Reviewer(s): Duckworth, J.W.

Contributor(s): Wozencraft, C & Conroy, J.

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External Resources

For [Images and External Links to Additional Information, please see the Red List website](#).

Appendix

Habitats

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

| Habitat | Season | Suitability | Major Importance? |
|---|--------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1. Forest -> 1.1. Forest - Boreal | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 1. Forest -> 1.2. Forest - Subarctic | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 1. Forest -> 1.4. Forest - Temperate | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 3. Shrubland -> 3.3. Shrubland - Boreal | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 3. Shrubland -> 3.4. Shrubland - Temperate | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 4. Grassland -> 4.2. Grassland - Subarctic | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 4. Grassland -> 4.4. Grassland - Temperate | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 5. Wetlands (inland) -> 5.3. Wetlands (inland) - Shrub Dominated Wetlands | - | Suitable | - |
| 0. Root -> 6. Rocky areas (eg. inland cliffs, mountain peaks) | - | Suitable | - |
| 13. Marine Coastal/Supratidal -> 13.3. Marine Coastal/Supratidal - Coastal Sand Dunes | - | Suitable | Yes |
| 14. Artificial/Terrestrial -> 14.1. Artificial/Terrestrial - Arable Land | - | Suitable | - |
| 14. Artificial/Terrestrial -> 14.2. Artificial/Terrestrial - Pastureland | - | Suitable | - |
| 14. Artificial/Terrestrial -> 14.4. Artificial/Terrestrial - Rural Gardens | - | Suitable | Yes |

Threats

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

| Threat | Timing | Scope | Severity | Impact Score |
|---|-----------|---|----------|--------------|
| 5. Biological resource use -> 5.1. Hunting & trapping terrestrial animals -> 5.1.2. Unintentional effects (species is not the target) | Ongoing | - | - | - |
| | Stresses: | 2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality | | |
| 5. Biological resource use -> 5.1. Hunting & trapping terrestrial animals -> 5.1.3. Persecution/control | Ongoing | - | - | - |
| | Stresses: | 2. Species Stresses -> 2.1. Species mortality | | |
| 7. Natural system modifications -> 7.3. Other ecosystem modifications | Ongoing | - | - | - |
| | Stresses: | 1. Ecosystem stresses -> 1.2. Ecosystem degradation | | |

Conservation Actions in Place

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

| |
|---|
| Conservation Actions in Place |
| In-Place Land/Water Protection and Management |
| Occur in at least one PA: Yes |

Research Needed

(<http://www.iucnredlist.org/technical-documents/classification-schemes>)

| |
|---|
| Research Needed |
| 3. Monitoring -> 3.1. Population trends |

Additional Data Fields

| |
|--|
| Distribution |
| Lower elevation limit (m): 0 |
| Upper elevation limit (m): 3860 |
| Population |
| Population severely fragmented: No |
| All individuals in one subpopulation: No |
| Habitats and Ecology |
| Generation Length (years): 3.3 |
| Movement patterns: Not a Migrant |

Amended

**Amended
reason:**

Occurrence of the species on the Azores and Sao Tome Island were reported in the Geographic Range text originally but not coded under the Countries of Occurrence. This amended version corrects these errors. The range map has not been updated to reflect the introduced range.

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