



ENVIS NEWSLETTER



(Sponsored by Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate
Change, Government of India, New Delhi)

STATE ANIMAL OF PUDUCHERRY (SQUIRREL)

Volume-VIII-II

April – June -2017



ENVIS HUB CENTER

Department of Science, Technology & Environment
Puducherry Pollution Control Committee
3rd Floor, PHB Building,
Anna Nagar,
Puducherry - 605 005.

E-mail: dste.pon@nic.in, envis.pon@nic.in

Website: <http://dste.puducherry.gov.in>

URL : <http://dste.puducherry.gov.in/envisnew/envis1.htm>

State Animal of Pondicherry (Squirrel)

Binomial Name	: <i>Funambulus palmarum</i>
Common Name	: Squirrel
Family	: Sciuridae
Name in other language:	Squirrel (English), gilahri (Hindu), kathbirai (Bengali), anilu, inachi (Kannada), anil (Tamil), uduta (Telugu)
Type	: Mammal
Diet	: Omnivore
Size	: 15-20cm (6-7.8in)
Weight	: 100-120g (3.5-4.2oz)

The Puducherry Union Territory has no large and charismatic wild animals but small animals like squirrels, mongoose, varanus, civet cat, jackal and many snakes are found. Squirrel is exploited the most for its body hair, fur for trophies, meat and other purposes.

It has been widely quoted in the ancient Puranas and literature that mongoose were known for dispersal of fruit and seeds and also it is found near the residential areas and it was domesticated by the people and reared as pet in the houses. It also builds nest in the houses that is why it is called as Anil Pillai.

Once the Squirrel was found in abundance, but now it has become rarer and rarer in due course of time and it is hardly seen. As per the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 squirrel has been placed under schedule IV and it is considered as endangered. Hence it is declared as the State Animal of Puducherry .



The squirrel family includes tree squirrels, ground squirrels, chipmunks, marmots (including woodchucks), flying squirrels, and prairie dogs amongst other rodents.

Distribution

The **Indian palm squirrel** or **three-striped palm squirrel** (*Funambulus palmarum*) is a species of rodent in the family Sciuridae that includes small or medium-size rodents found naturally in India (south of the Vindhyas) and Sri Lanka. In the late 19th century, the palm squirrel was introduced to Madagascar, Réunion, Mayotte, Comoro Islands, Mauritius, Seychelles and Australia, where it has since become a minor pest. The closely related five-striped palm squirrel, *F. pennantii*, is found in northern India, and its range partly overlaps with this species.

Description

Indian palm squirrel can reach 6 to 7.8 inches in length and 3.5 to 4.2 ounces of weight. Indian palm squirrel is covered with short fur that is yellowish-brown or brown-colored on the back and creamy-white on the belly. It has three white stripes on the back that stretch from the head to tail. Due to unusual coloration, Indian palm squirrel is also known as three-striped squirrel.



Indian palm squirrel has dark, rounded eyes, small triangular ears, long front teeth and long bushy tail. Juvenile squirrels have significantly lighter coloration, which gets progressively darker as they age. Albinism is rare, but exists in this species.

Habitat and Ecology

Indian palm squirrel is a very adaptable species. It is active during the day (diurnal animal) and semi-arboreal. This species occurs in tropical and subtropical dry deciduous forest, mangrove forest, grasslands, scrublands, plantations, rural gardens and urban areas. In Sri Lanka, found throughout the island except in deep jungles.

Life cycle

Pregnancy lasts 34 to 45 days and ends with 1 to 5 babies. Females produce 2 to 3 litters per year. Young Indian palm squirrels are fully weaned at the age of 10 weeks. They reach sexual maturity at the age of 9 months. Indian palm squirrel can survive 2 to 4 years in the wild and 5.5 years in captivity.

Diet and behaviour

Indian palm squirrel is an omnivore. Its diet is mostly based on the fruit and nuts, but it also consumes eggs, small birds, larvae and insects. Indian palm squirrel collects food and protects its stashes aggressively from other squirrels and birds. Unlike other species of squirrels, Indian palm squirrel doesn't hibernate during the winter. Indian palm squirrel is solitary creature. It produces shrill "chip chip chip" calls when it detects predators. Natural enemies of Indian palm squirrels are snakes, birds of prey and wild cats.

Mating season of Indian palm squirrels takes place all year round. Indian palm squirrels are very active animals that become uncontrollably excited during the mating season. Males often fight to get opportunity to mate. Indian palm squirrels build nests in the treetops using the grass and branches.



Importance in Hinduism

Indian palm squirrel has important part in the Hindu mythology. Squirrels are considered sacred in India and are not to be harmed. They are even fed by many Hindu families, mainly because of their association with Lord Rama.

A legend explains the stripes on the back of most of the squirrels. During the construction of the Rama Setu (bridge) at Rameswaram by Lord Rama and the Vanara Sena, a little squirrel also contributed in its own little way. It rolled in the beach sand and then ran to the end of the bridge to shake off the sand from its back (chanting Lord Rama's name all along).

Lord Rama, pleased by the creature's dedication, caressed the squirrel's back and ever since, the Indian squirrel carried white stripes on its back, which are believed to be the mark of Lord Rama's fingers. Lord Rama and the squirrel are mentioned in one of the hymns of the Alvars.



* **Impacts caused by Squirrels**

* **Environmental**

- ✧ Eats native bird eggs.
- ✧ Could compete with native gliders for resources.

* **Economic**

- ✧ Could damage fruit crops such as mango, apples, pineapples and grapes.

* **Social**

- ✧ Urban nuisance and scavenger.



Squirrels as Pets

It is advised not to have squirrels as pets. They are wild animals and should be with the nature. Some people fancy keeping them within four bars which is really a sin.

References

1. Human Ageing Genomic Resources, AnAge database, retrieved 7/30/2007 AnAge entry for *Funambulus palmarum*
2. <http://forest.puducherry.gov.in/our-state-symbols.html>
3. [http://www.ecoheritage.cpreec.org/Viewcontall.php?\\$mFJyBfK\\$MkoNJ@juGn2](http://www.ecoheritage.cpreec.org/Viewcontall.php?$mFJyBfK$MkoNJ@juGn2)
4. Nameer, P. O. & Molur, S. (2008). *Funambulus palmarum*. In: IUCN 2008. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Retrieved 6 January 2009.
5. Wikipedia

ENVIRONMENT EVENTS

Swachhta Hi Seva” Campaign - 2017

As a part of the “Swachhta Hi Seva” Campaign the following activities were organized by the Department of Science, Technology and Environment, Puducherry Pollution Control Committee, ENVIS Centre, Puducherry and the Forest and Wildlife Department of Puducherry on 28.09.2017 during the visit of Smt. Rita Khanna, Director and Shri. N. Subrhamanyam, Dy. Director from MoEF&CC, New Delhi.

Green Pledge:

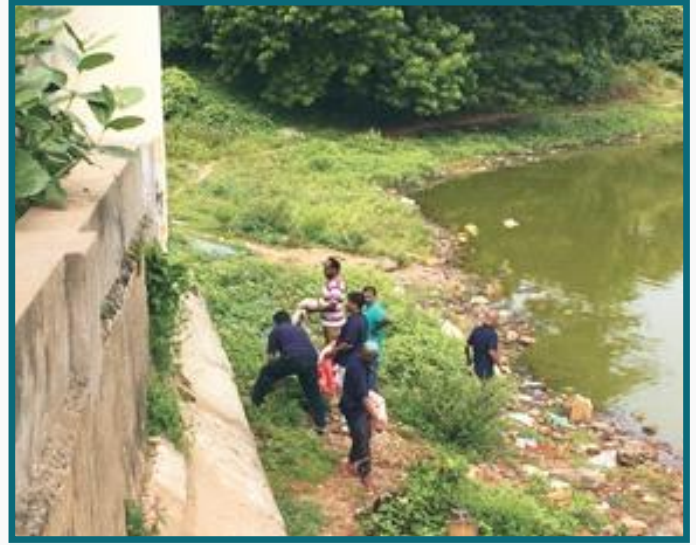
The Green Pledge in English and in Tamil language was taken up by a large gathering of Government staffs, officials and volunteers who gathered in the Oussudu Bird Sanctuary for cleanup activities. Smt. Rita Khanna, Director MoEF&CC read the Green Pledge and the others repeated it. Shri. G. Kumar, Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, Shri. G. Sathiyamoorthy, I.F.S., Dy. Conservator of Forests and M. Dwarakanath, Director, Department of Science, Technology and Environment, Puducherry along with officials of DSTE & PPCC was present.



Clean-up activities:

i) Cleaning of Protected Areas / Lakes:

Massive Cleanup Programme was organized by the Forest and Wild Life Department and Department of Science, Technology and Environment in the Ousteri Lake. The Lake is situated about 10 kms from Puducherry town and it is protected Bird Sanctuary. The lake sprawls about 390 hectares area and supports a variety of flora and fauna including several varieties of migratory Birds. During the one day cleaning program, the staffs of the Forest Department, volunteers from NGOs and officials removed the plastic and other trash around the lake and the wastes collected were handed over to Municipal Solid Waste Disposal Site.



ii) Cleaning of Market areas (Sanmugapuram Market):

A Clean-up programme was organized in the Sanmugapuram Market area by the Department of Science, Technology and Environment, Puducherry Pollution Control Committee and Forest and Wild Life Department along with the staffs and workers of the Oulgaret Municipality and Swatchada Corporation.



iii) Cleaning of Market areas (Lawspet Market):

A Clean-up programme was organized in the Lawspet Market called as 'Uzhavar Sandhai' or 'Farmers Market' where farmers directly sell their produce like fruits and vegetables without any middle men. The programme was organized by Department of Science, Technology and Environment, Puducherry Pollution Control Committee and Forest and Wild Life Department along with the staffs and workers of the Oulgaret Municipality and Swatchada Corporation with voluntary participation of the Market Vendors.

iv) Cleaning of Coastal Areas

A massive coastal Clean-up Campaign was organized by the Government of Puducherry during the International Coastal Cleanup Day “2017” event organized on 16.09.2017. The Event was inaugurated by Hon'ble Chief Minister, Hon'ble Minister for Science, Technology and Environment and Hon'ble Minister for Education participated. Massive Cleanup activities were carried out along the beaches of Puducherry and Karaikal regions with involvement of all Government Departments, Coast Guard and Volunteers from NSS, NCC and other NGOs. The litters around the beach were collected and disposed it through the Municipality.

Tree Plantation:

In continuation of the Tree Plantation activities being carried out in Ousuteri Bird Sanctuary about 50 Tree Saplings were planted during the visit of the Officials from the MoEF&CC on 18.09.2017.



Greening of Puducherry

The Hon'ble Environment Minister has initiated and distributed 8000 No's of tree saplings to the school students and public in various locality of Puducherry as a measure for increasing the greenery of Puducherry.



Editorial Board (ENVIS Hub Centre, PPCC)

M. DWARAKANATH

Member Secretary (PPCC)

Sh.P. VIPIN BABU

Scientist/ ENVIS Co-ordinator

Smt. J. NITHIYA

Programme Officer

ENVIS PROJECT Sponsored by

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For Details Please Contact:

The Member Secretary,

Puducherry Pollution Control Committee

3rd Floor, PHB Building, Anna Nagar,

Puducherry - 5.

Ph: 0413-2201256 | Fax : 0413 -2203494

e-mail: envis.pon@nic.in, dste.pon@nic.in

website : <http://dste.puducherry.gov.in>

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