

Bare-bellied or Madras Hedgehog, *Paraechinus nudiventris*, (Horsfield 1851) in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

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South Asian Hedgehogs: The short, grooved white and brown spines that cover the upper part of the body characterize hedgehogs. The face and abdomen has soft, light-colored fur. It possess the ability to roll its body as a tight ball when defense. Sexing of animals is very easy. They are fossorial and nocturnal. Dig burrow under logs, leaves, near the rocks and most of the day spending their time in sleep. They wake up in the dusk to look for food. It smells and hears well. Normally the European species go for hibernation in winter and African and other species go for Aestivation in summer.

Hedgehogs are mammals and belongs to the order Erinaceomorpha, family Erinaceidae and subfamily Erinaceinae and it has two genera *Hemiechinus* and *Paraechinus*. Under genus *Hemiechinus* there are two species of hedgehogs found in South Asia. They are: *Hemiechinus auritus* (Long-eared Hedgehog) and *Hemiechinus collaris* (Collared or Indian long-eared hedgehog). The genus *Paraechinus* represented by three species of hedgehogs in South Asia, *Paraechinus hypomelas* (Brandt's Hedgehog), *Paraechinus micropus* (Indian Hedgehog) and *Paraechinus nudiventris* (Bare-bellied or Madras Hedgehog).

Of the five species of hedgehogs found in South Asia, three species are found in India and they are: *H. Collaris*, *P. micropus*, and *P. nudiventris*. *H. collaris* and *P. micropus* is endemic to South Asia and found in India and Pakistan.

P. nudiventris Madras Hedgehog is endemic to southern India and it is found in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is listed as Least Concern in IUCN Redlist in view of its abundance within its distribution and its presumed large population. It inhabits dry deciduous scrubby areas with *acacia* and rocky habitats. Habitat loss due to collection of fuel wood, logging, agriculture and urbanisation are major threats. There is no much study about this species in wild as well as in captivity.



Three females rescued from Pappampatti Privu, Coimbatore shows its defense behaviour. Photo by K. Asokan.



A male rescued from Kovilpalayam. Photo by R. Marimuthu

Madras Hedgehogs in Coimbatore: The VOC Park Mini Zoo received four Madras Hedgehogs in two occasions on December 2013. Three females were rescued from Pappampatti Privu (11°0'39"N 77°5'19"E) outskirts of Coimbatore city and about 15kms from the city center and one male from Kovilpalayam (11.135287°N

77.03433°E) on NH209 on the Sathyamangalam Road. They were kept under observation for one to two days and released back into wild at

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Narsampathi Lake, Nagarajapuram near Sugarcane Breeding Centre, Coimbatore. Since they are omnivorous in diet and prefers insects; it is very difficult to feed them in captivity. During the observation period, they were fed with fruits, minced beef and groundnut. Except groundnut the animal preferred nothing. The second author in his two years of tenure at the zoo, received more than 10 animals from the public, but he released all of them back in to wild.

Earlier in 2004, they received an individual from Karumathampatti, (11.1167°N 77.1833°E) another suburb of Coimbatore, 28kms away from the city on the NH47. This was rescued by a farmer in his farm, mistaken as a strange animal of rodent species and stoned but he saved and brought to the zoo.

This shows that the Coimbatore rural district is potential habitat for this species and further field studies are needed to ascertain its ecology, distribution, population status and threats.

Hedgehogs kept in Indian Zoos:

The Central Zoo Authority's animal inventory database documents the following zoos in India have kept *Hemiechinus auritus* (Long-eared Hedgehog) from time to time since 1995. Alipore Zoological Gardens-Kolkata, Kamala Nehru Zoological Gardens-Ahmedabad, Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden-Gauhati, Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park-Patna, National Zoological Park-New Delhi, Sundervan Nature Discovery Centre-Ahmedabad, Jodhpur Zoo, Manipur Zoological Gardens and Thiruvnanthapuram Zoo. But as per the latest 2012-2013 inventory only the Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park is keeping one unidentified specimen of this species. But the reality is *Hemiechinus auritus* is not having distribution range in India and they only found in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The identification of these specimens needs verification. The species kept in South Indian zoos could be *P. nudiventris*, and collection in other zoos in India may be *H. collaris* or *P. micropus*. The animal stock register of the zoos should be checked for their origin to ensure the correct identity of the species.

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Announcement

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Applications are invited for purely time bound position of **Junior Research Fellow** under Department of Science & Technology, Science & Engineering Research Board (DST-SERB) funded research project entitled "**Ecology and habitat-suitability of Indian spiny-tailed lizard *Saara hardwickii* (Gray, 1827) in Rajasthan, India**".

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Qualification: M.Sc. (Animal Sciences/Zoology/Life Sciences/Wildlife/ Biodiversity & Conservation/Any other branch of Biological Sciences/Environmental Studies/Geoinformatics) and NET (including LS) qualified. The person to be considered must have second class master degree with a minimum of 55% marks (50% in case of SC/ST/PH)

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