

# Preying on mongoose: Every year, 50,000 animals are killed for making brushes

Source: Hindustan times, Dec 24, 2018



On September 30, officers of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and the Uttar Pradesh forest department raided houses and factories in the sleepy village of Sherkot in Bijnor district, UP, to seize 155 kgs of raw mongoose hair and 56,000 brushes made from it. This was the biggest seizure of its kind in the country and officials estimated that at least 3,000 animals were killed to collect so much hair. Six persons were arrested and booked under various wildlife crime laws.

A little over a month later, on December 10, WCCB officials, coordinating with the Delhi-based Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), simultaneously raided 13 locations across the country, seizing thousands of brushes made out of mongoose hair. This was the 27th crackdown by the WCCB on the illegal trade in the last two years.

While poaching of elephants, one-horned rhinos and pangolins, as well as the death of tigers have traditionally elicited strong reactions, the killing of thousands of mongoose has largely gone unnoticed. “Despite all these raids, if you go to any shop in major Indian cities, they still stock brushes made out of mongoose hair. The number of animals killed for this trade is the single largest threat the species faces today,” says Jose Louies, chief of enforcement, WTI. “Even though there are other alternatives available, the fine quality of the hair, its durability and brittleness has endangered the animal.”

### **For art’s sake**

“The sensitivity of the brush, the fine finishing and its capacity to absorb paint are what makes it preferable for many artists. Synthetic brushes just don’t have the same quality,” says Natarajan Gangadharan, an artist and former faculty at the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai. “Having said that, many artists are aware of the issue and do not purchase such brushes. I have to say, though, that there are still a few who prefer brushes made from such material for the quality it offers.”

Mongoose --- small carnivorous mammals, with a long body and tail and a grizzled or banded coat --- are widely found in India, in the countryside, on farm land and in forest areas. Traditional hunting communities that prey on them include the Narikuruvas in Tamil Nadu, Hakki Pakki in Karnataka, Gonds in Andhra and Karnataka, and the Gulias, Seperas and Nath in central and northern India. These communities are the main suppliers of raw mongoose hair.

“Over a period of time, the collector-middlemen-distributor network became strong and well-established so that the main collectors of the hair visit the hunters and buy the hair from them on a regular basis. The quantity

may vary from a few grams to kilos and the price range is between 3000-5000 rupees per kilo,” says Louies of WTI.

He adds, “Earlier, these brushes were manufactured by many reputed brush manufacturers. As the illegal nature of the trade came to light in the early 2000s, major manufacturers stopped production. But the demand from buyers ensured that smaller manufacturers kept producing the brushes.”

Mongoose are listed under Schedule 2, Part 2 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and their hunting, possession, transportation and trade are offences, punishable with imprisonment up to seven years. They are also protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Six different species are found across the country: Indian grey mongoose, small Indian mongoose, ruddy mongoose, crab-eating mongoose, stripe-necked mongoose and brown mongoose. The Indian grey mongoose is the most commonly found species and also the most hunted.

### **Save the mongoose**

“We don’t want to put an exact market value on our seizures since that might serve to encourage the illegal trade, but suffice to say, illegal trade in mongoose hair is among the highest priorities for the WCCB,” says Tilotama Varma, additional director, WCCB.

Varma and the WCCB have been tracking the illegal trade network and are preparing for further action. “While in other wildlife crimes, most of the consumption of the illegal products are abroad, in this case, the domestic market itself is enormous. We have also found during recent raids that finer

quality of hair is being sold in certain factories, we are trying to trace their suppliers now.”

Traditionally, the small town of Sherkot has been the epicentre for this illegal trade. The hair is shipped in trains as parcel and concealed in bags labelled as textiles. It is similarly shipped for wholesale and retail trade.

As of now, it is important to create awareness about the plight of the mongoose. As Saket Badola, head, TRAFFIC India, a wildlife trade monitoring network, says, “It takes the lives of 50 animals for one kilogram of hair. Each mongoose yields around 40 grams of hair, out of which only 20 grams can be used to make brushes. Artists and the general public need to know this and stop using brushes made from mongoose hair. As of now, sales are only going up and this is a big cause for concern.”