

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## CANNIBALISTIC BEHAVIOUR IN CAPTIVE WESTERN GHATS SQUIRREL, *FUNAMBULUS TRISTRIATUS* WATERHOUSE\*

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Cannibalism among rodents is reported in the north Indian palm squirrel, *Funambulus pennanti*, (GUPTA & AGRAWAL, 1968), in Arctic ground squirrel, *Spermophilus parryii* (HOLMES, 1977), in desert gerbil, *Meriones hurrianae* (PRAKASH & KUMBAKARNI, 1962), and in Indian gerbil, *Tatera indica indica* (PUROHIT, 1977). PRAKASH (1954) reported cannibalism in hedgehogs. LANE-PETTER (1968) discussed the causes inducing cannibalism in rats and mice, and so did PUROHIT & BOHRA (1973) in the house rat, *Rattus rattus rufescens*. In this communication the cannibalistic behaviour in captive Western Ghats squirrel, *F. tristriatus* is discussed.

Pregnant squirrels were trapped from the field to study the litter size and post-natal development. Each squirrel was housed in separate laboratory cage (75 x 30 x 30 cm). They were provided with nesting materials collected from nests of other squirrels from the field. Sufficient quantity of food (paddy, wheat, papaya, cashew apple, coconut kernel etc.) and water was always made available.

Three female squirrels showed severe cannibalistic propensities towards their young. The first squirrel gave birth to two young and consumed both of them within one week. It

held its young in its foreleg and started consuming it from the head end. The gerbils (both *T. indica indica* and *M. hurrianae*) were also observed to attack first the head portion of their young (PUROHIT, 1977; PRAKASH & KUMBAKARNI, 1962). The second squirrel also gave birth to two young, but it consumed them only when they were 15 days old. The third squirrel gave birth to three young; but it consumed one of its young on the fourth day, another on the tenth day and last one on the 19th day of postnatal development. In another case two sub adult male squirrels, of body weight 84 and 86g respectively, were housed together in a cage (75 x 35 x 30 cm). Sufficient quantity of food and water was always made available. On the tenth day of captivity one squirrel (weighing 86g) was found dead and its head (excepting the skin) completely eaten by the other squirrel. To confirm this, one more sub adult (weighing 80g) squirrel was released into the cage. Next day this newly introduced squirrel was also found dead with its head portion completely missing. It is interesting to note that the captive squirrels becoming cannibals inspite of the fact that sufficient

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quantity of food materials was provided in the cage regularly. This aspect invites further detailed study as to the causo-mechanisms of cannibalism in *Funambulus tristriatus*.

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