

LITTLE CHEESES



A
CEYLON PRESS
TINY GUIDE TO SRI LANKA'S

MICE

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THE SRI LANKAN SPINY MOUSE

In a
Word
or Two

Sri Lanka is home to a very respectable range of mouse species, three of which are endemic to the island - Mayor's Spiny Mouse (which actually comes into two distinct but impossible to tell apart variants); the very rare Sri Lankan Spiny Mouse; and the almost equally rare Ceylon Highland Long-Tailed Tree Mouse.

These tiny patriotic native creatures are joined by a range of others mice typically found in other parts of South and South East Asia including the fetching Indian Field Mouse, the almost-domesticated Indian House Mouse, the Indian Long-Tailed Tree Mouse (host to an especially undesirable tick), and the rather clumsily named Ceylon Field Mouse, whose home actually stretches from Sri Lanka to Cambodia.

THE CEYLON FIELD MOUSE



IMAGE COURTESY OF FINN MOUSE'S SITE.

As widely distributed as only the most successful mammals are, the Ceylon Field Mouse is to be found well outside the island's shores from India to Cambodia - as well as within them. It happily populates almost all kinds of habitats. It is often called the Fawn Colour Mouse for its light fur, and grows to little more than 15 centimetres in length, nose to tail.

THE CEYLON HIGHLAND LONG-TAILED TREE MOUSE



IMAGE COURTESY OF ANIMALIA.

Discovered in 1929 by the Dutch tea planter, Adriaan Constant Tutein-Nolthenius, the Ceylon Highland Long-Tailed Tree Mouse (*Vendeleuria Oleracea Nolthenii*) is an increasingly rare creature, little more than 21 centimetres in length, nose to tail. It is found in

Sri Lanka's hill country where it lives in trees, venturing out only by night.

Like most mice, it has reddish brown fur, that occasionally grows darker but, compared to its many cousins, presents somewhat disappointingly small ears.

THE INDIAN FIELD MOUSE



IMAGE PUBLIC DOMAIN.

The tiny (13 centimetres in length, nose to tail) Indian Field Mouse is one of those mammals of the Indian sub-continent that has long term residency rights in Sri Lanka where it is found almost everywhere. It is all a mouse aims to be, with a small rounded hunched body, lovely rounded smooth ears, and light brown to white fur.

THE INDIAN HOUSE MOUSE



IMAGE COURTESY OF ELIFESCIENCES.ORG

Beloved of mouse pet owners, science and regularly used in laboratories, the Indian House Mouse (*Mus Musculus Castaneus*) is what most commonly comes to mind when something thinks of a mouse. It is widely

distributed across Asia and elsewhere and in urban areas it has become an almost tame companion to the humans its lives around.

Rarely more than 20 centimetres in length, nose to tail, it is one of the most studied and understood mammals in the world, its typical behavioural characteristics itemized even down to the differences exhibited if it lives in sandy dunes as opposed to apartment buildings.

THE INDIAN LONG-TAILED TREE MOUSE



IMAGE COURTESY OF SUDHIR BHANDARKAR.

Common throughout South and South East Asia, the Asiatic or Indian Long-Tailed Climbing Mouse (*Vandeleuria Oleracea*) grows to little more than twenty centimetres in length, nose to tail, and sports reddish brown fur that fades to white on its

underparts. It is widely distributed – but not a creature to go out of your way to befriend for it is notorious for spreading the tick-borne viral Kyasanur Forest Disease that causes headaches, chills, muscle pain, and vomiting and can take months to recover from.

THE INDIAN SOFT-FURRED RAT



IMAGE PUBLIC DOMAIN

The Indian Soft-Furred Rat (*Milardia Meltada Meltada*) is one of the most successful rats of South Asia, and calls India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka home. It is one of a number of Asiatic rats that have made their home in Sri Lanka. It is wholly unfussy about its habitat, happy in grass or forest, tropical or sub-tropical regions. Almost thirty centimetres in length nose to tail, it has the brown-grey fur that blends to white on its undersides.

MAYOR'S SPINY MOUSE



IMAGE COURTESY OF PEARL OF THE EARTH.

Mayor's Spiny Mouse (*Mus Mayori*) inhabits the smaller end of the mouse spectrum, and comes in two (still quite widespread) variants – *Mus Mayori Mayori*, which inhabit the hill country; and *Mus Mayori Pococki* which prefers the low wetlands. Telling them apart is

almost impossible, and both are covered with reddish grey fur and exhibit rather unsatisfactorily small ears.

Seeing them is also a challenge for they are both nocturnal cerates.

One of their more interesting (albeit worrying) points of difference to other mice is their capacity to carry quite so many other creatures on them – including mites, ticks, sucking louses and small scorpions.

THE SRI LANKAN SPINY MOUSE



IMAGE COURTESY OF INATURALIST.

A mere maximum of 18 centimetres length, from nose to tail, the Ceylon Spiny Mouse (*Mus fernandoni*) is found only in Sri Lanka, one of its prized endemic species. It is now so endangered that it can be seen in a few locations, becoming sadly ever more rare

than nightclubs on Neptune. Its reddish grey back and sides morph into white underparts, with huge gorgeous smooth scooped out ears that stand like parasols above large dark eyes. It is a mouse to fall in love with.



DISCOVER MORE

A small island surrounded by large oceans, Sri Lanka is a mystery to many: remote, hard to place; a well-kept secret. The Ceylon Press aims to make its complicated story more accessible.

Read its story in *A History of Sri Lanka*, or hear it as a podcast. The *Companion to Sri Lanka* makes visible more of the whole. The digital Museum of Sri Lanka unites the island's artefacts – scattered around the world – into a single exhibition. Its downloadable eBooks cover all Sri Lankan subjects. Its podcast, *Poetry from the Jungle*, presents the work of 80 poets to reset the literary canon. And in case it all gets too serious, enjoy the off-grid *Jungle Diaries* blog and Podcast. All these works are added to weekly and available free at theceylonpress.com.



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