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8. THE MALABAR SPINY DORMOUSE (*PLATACANTHOMYS LASIURUS*) IN THE KALAKAD MUNDANTHURAI TIGER RESERVE, TAMIL NADU

The spiny dormouse is a small, beautiful rodent, smaller than the house rat but with a very characteristic bushy tail tip. Also called the pepper rat, it is endemic to the Western Ghats; found mostly in the southern Western Ghats but can occur as far north as Shimoga (Rajagopalan, 1968). It is the only representative of the genus in India (Jerdon, 1874). This rodent has not been recorded from the Kakachi areas of KMTR but occurs at a lower elevation at Bonakadu in the same reserve (Webb-Peploe, 1947) and is probably common in higher forest even elsewhere in the reserve.

Being a nocturnal arboreal animal, it was very rarely seen by us during the day, due to its versatile ability to climb any twiners and branches with minimum disturbance and maximum speed. Evidence of this animal was first noticed during my studies on seed predation in Kakachi when many fruits and seeds were seen removed overnight. Prolonged nocturnal

observations on seed and fruit piles gave the first sighting of the dormouse.

The animal appears to be abundant in the area, judging by the fruit removal from many trees within a few acres. There is no other nocturnal rodent with this uncanny ability to pick seeds even from fruits twice its own size. It also has the habit of hoarding seeds, and rarely forages on the ground. Our preliminary studies indicate that such foraging behaviour of the dormouse could have significant effect on tree recruitment through seed predation.

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