

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Animal Abstract

Element Code: AMAJE01010

Data Sensitivity: No

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Bassariscus astutus*

COMMON NAME: Ringtail, Ringtailed Cat, Miner's Cat, Civet Cat

SYNONYMS:

FAMILY: Procyonidae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION: *Bassariscus astutus* Coues, 1887. *Bassariscus astutus* Lichtenstein, 1830.

TYPE LOCALITY: Mexico City Mexico, exact locality unknown.

TYPE SPECIMEN: Unknown

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: Genus contains only two living species, *B. astutus* and *B. sumichrasti* (which lives in Central America). Fourteen subspecies have been described, only *B. a. arizonensis*, *yumanensis*, and *nevadensis* occur in Arizona.

DESCRIPTION: A cat-sized mammal resembling a small fox with a raccoon-like tail. The tail is as long as head-body length. Muzzle is elongate, pointed, and grizzled; nose pad is blackish. Mystical vibrissae mostly black and up to 75 mm (3 in) long. Eyes have chestnut-brown iris and round pupil; are large and ringed with black or dark brown pelage, and are bounded by supra-orbital, sub-orbital and sub-auricular patches of white or pale buff, creating a striking mask. Body pelage ranges from stony gray through light brown to golden tan, with longer black-tipped guard hairs and plumbeous underfur on upper body. Hair color paler on sides and dark down the middle of back. Feet are semi-plantigrade and pentadactyle; second, third, fourth, and fifth digits of fore and hind feet densely haired on lower surface behind and around digital pad. Pads naked. Tail long and solidly white or pale buff underneath: Tail is marked by numerous (14-16) alternating black and white rings and a black tip. Bands narrow at base of tail, not distinct, and rather wood brown in color. Bands increase in width distally. Fur on the tails is short, averaging only about 10 mm in length on dorsal portion midway on tail. Tail is parallel sided, not tapering. Measures 6.16-8.11 cm (2.4-3.2 in) in total length (tail length 3.1-4.38 cm (-1.72 in)), and weigh 870-1,100 g (1.92-2.42 lb). Populations tend to be smaller in the interior West, Southwest, and Baja California, and larger in southern Mexico.

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION: *Bassariscus astutus* is about 24% smaller than *B. sumichrasti*. Hair on bottom of digits in *B. astutus* is missing in *B. sumichrasti*.

ILLUSTRATIONS: Drawing (Jameson and Peeters, 1988)
Distribution map (Hall, 1981)
Black and White Photo (Hoffmeister, 1986)
Color photo (Wilson, 1999)
Color photo (In <http://www.tped.state.tx.us/nature/wid/mammals/rtail.htm>)
Color photo (In <http://www.desertusa.com/mag01/mar/papr/ringt.html>)

TOTAL RANGE: South western Oregon south along Pacific coast to southern end of Baja. Portions of Nevada, Utah, Missouri, Louisiana and Kansas. Most of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Mexico.

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Essentially Statewide. Not found in most flatlands and in high elevations.

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: Nocturnal, bold but not aggressive, secretive. Dens in caves, crevices, and hollow trees. Uses abandoned buildings and even attics of occupied dwellings. Will visit campsites and rummage through gear sometimes taking items, especially shiny ones. Agile climbers, negotiating trees and sheer rock faces with ease. Several ringtails may occupy the same area. Afflictions include rabies and an assortment of fleas, ticks, mites, and lice externally, and cestodes and nematodes internally. Coyotes, bobcats, great horned owls and other sizable carnivores prey on ringtails. The ringtail's considerable tail provides balance for negotiating narrow ledges and limbs, even allowing them to reverse directions by performing a cartwheel. They can rotate their hind feet 180degrees, giving them the ability to rapidly descend cliffs or trees as well as cacti. Furthermore, ringtails can ascend narrow passages by stemming (pressing all feet on one wall and their back against the other or pressing both right feet on one wall and both left feet on the other, and wider cracks by ricocheting between walls.

REPRODUCTION: Mate in February-May. Females are receptive for only 24 hours. Litter consists of 3 to 4 young in April-July. Gestation is 51-54 days. Male helps in providing for family. Young begin roaming and foraging with parents at 8-9 weeks and leave the mother in late summer. Sexually mature at 10 months.

FOOD HABITS: Omniverous. Foraging mainly at night on small birds, rodents, lizards, snakes, invertebrates, and fruit. Consumptions of fruit such as prickly pear may reduce its need for water. They also regularly consume carrion, adding many non prey items to the diet.

HABITAT: Rocky walls of canyons, talus slopes, cliffs and ridges from desert scrub through chaparral and the oak-pine belt. Less common in heavily wooded areas. Associated with water (within .5 miles) such as rivers, streams, tinajas, seeps and springs. Daytime retreats

and nurseries are often rock crevices, boulder piles, rock slides, tree hollows, or ground dens (often dug by other mammals). Will also use human dwellings.

ELEVATION: 0-9,500 ft (0-2900 m)

PLANT COMMUNITY: Desert scrub through chaparral and the oak-pine belt.

POPULATION TRENDS: Apparently stable.

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS: None
STATE STATUS: None
OTHER STATUS: Threatened in Mexico (Secretaria de Medio Ambiente 2000)

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: Is trapped for fur in some locations, subject to poisoning from scavenging effected carcasses.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN: Unknown.

SUGGESTED PROJECTS: Unknown

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: NPS - Grand Canyon National Park; USFS - Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Kaibab, Prescott, and Tonto National Forests.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

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MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Designated State Mammal of Arizona on 08-13-1986.

Because ringtails do not walk on the soles of their feet they are sometimes placed in their own family, Bassariscidae. The oldest *Bassariscus* fossils come from Miocene-age (24-26 million year old) rocks in Nebraska, Nevada, and California.

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