

Malabar giant squirrel

India boasts an impressive array of squirrel species, each with its own unique traits and geographical range. Among the most iconic is the Indian giant squirrel, with its stunning multicoloured fur, inhabiting the forests of southern India. Urban and rural areas are also teeming with Indian palm squirrels, renowned for their lively antics. Gardens and forests across India harbour the five-striped palm squirrel, featuring five distinctive stripes that set it apart from other squirrels. While squirrels are widely admired for their vital role in seed dispersal and forest regeneration, they can also pose a nuisance to homeowners, damaging property and electrical wiring. Nonetheless, these captivating creatures form an essential part of India's diverse and invaluable wildlife, adding to the country's rich biological heritage

Malabar giant squirrel

SL NO	Characteristics	Malabar Giant Squirrel
1	Common Name	Malabar Giant Squirrel
2	Scientific Name	Ratufa indica
3	Length	25-45 cm (body) + 45-60 cm (tail)
4	Colour	Vibrant orange, black, and white fur
5	Height / girth	Up to 50 cm (height)
6	Tail length	45-60 cm
7	Height till shoulder	Around 30 cm
8	Average weight	1.5-2 kg
9	Food habits	Primarily herbivorous, feeding on fruits, nuts, and leaves

10	Habitat	Canopy of tropical and subtropical forests in the Western Ghats of India
11	Interesting facts	The Malabar giant squirrel is known for its strikingly beautiful and colourful fur. They are also agile climbers and jumpers, able to leap up to 6 metres between trees. Their tail is used for balance while jumping and as a parachute while descending. They are considered an important seed disperser for many plant species in their habitat. In some parts of India, they are considered sacred and are protected by local communities.

Features

The Malabar giant squirrel, also known as the Indian giant squirrel or Malabar squirrel, is a species of tree squirrel native to India. The Malabar giant squirrel is known for its striking, vibrant colours. Their fur can range from deep maroon to bright orange, with some individuals displaying shades of blue, purple, and green. These colours help them blend in with their surroundings in the forest canopy.

Males are generally larger than females, with males measuring around 45-60 cm in length, including their tail, and weighing up to 1.5 kg. Females are slightly smaller, measuring around 40-50 cm in length, including their tail, and weighing up to 1 kg.

The Malabar giant squirrel has large, bushy tails that are almost as long as their bodies. Their tails help them balance as they move through the trees, and they can also use them as a parachute to slow their descent when jumping from branch to

branch. They also have large, powerful hind legs that enable them to leap up to 6 meters between trees. The Malabar giant squirrel is known for its acrobatic abilities, which allow it to move quickly and gracefully through the forest canopy. They are primarily arboreal, spending most of their time in the treetops, where they feed on fruits, nuts, and seeds. They are also known for their loud, distinctive calls, which they use to communicate with each other and to establish their territory. Additionally, the Malabar giant squirrel has a unique adaptation in its teeth. Their incisors are separated by a gap called a diastema that enables them to open hard nuts with their powerful jaw muscles.

Food Habits

In terms of their food habits, the Malabar giant squirrel is primarily herbivorous, feeding on a variety of fruits, nuts, and seeds. They are known to feed on jackfruit, tamarind, and mango, as well as various types of nuts, such as cashews, almonds, and walnuts. They also consume the bark of certain trees, as well as insects and other small animals on occasion.

Habitats

The Malabar giant squirrel is native to the Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, Satpura Range of mountains and Orissa forests. There are sub species of the Indian Giant Squirrel that have slight variations. Most of them are found in the Western Ghats.

They prefer to live in dense, tropical forests with plenty of tall trees, as they are primarily arboreal animals. They are found at elevations ranging from sea level to 2000 metres above sea level.

Vulnerable Species

The Malabar giant squirrel is classified as a species of “Least Concern” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which means that it is not considered to be at immediate risk of extinction. However, the population of the Malabar giant squirrel is declining due to habitat loss and fragmentation caused by deforestation, urbanisation, and other human activities.

The exact number of Malabar giant squirrels in India is unknown, but it is estimated that the population size is decreasing. Their habitat has been fragmented into smaller patches, which affects their ability to move and find food. This, in turn, can lead to a decrease in their population size. Additionally, the loss of forest cover also affects the availability of their preferred food sources.

Protected Areas

The Malabar giant squirrel is found in several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries in India. Silent Valley National Park in Kerala, is home to a variety of endangered species, including the Malabar giant squirrel.

Anshi National Park in Karnataka, is known for its dense forests and diverse wildlife, including the Malabar giant squirrel. Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka, is home to several species of primates, birds, and mammals, including the Malabar giant squirrel.

Periyar National Park in Kerala, is known for its large elephant population, as well as other wildlife, including the Malabar giant squirrel. Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park in Tamil Nadu, is home to a variety of endangered species, including the Malabar giant squirrel.