

Bull. zool. Surv. India, 6 (1-3) : 333-334, 1984

AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF THE HOUSE SHREW, *SUNCUS MURINUS*
(LINNAEUS) TOWARDS DOMESTIC CAT

House rats and mice fall easy prey to Domestic Cat whenever they come across or are released from traps in front of cats in the open. Whereas the House Shrew, *Suncus murinus* (Linnaeus) which has been recorded to be predated by the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba* (Khajuria and Ghosal 1970), and it itself has the records of attacking frogs (Dharmakumar-sinhji 1946; McCann 1937; Vasu 1946), snake (Behura 1958), leeches (Sanjeeva Raj 1959), scorpions and cockroaches (Blandford 1888), but has practically no record of interaction with a predator like the Domestic Cat. The authors had the opportunity of studying its behaviour towards Domestic Cat which is recorded hereunder.

A House Shrew trapped on 8th May, 1982 from Rajchandrapur, District Haora, West Bengal, by using wooden trap was released in the morning hours in a field in front of a Domestic Cat to find their interaction. The cat immediately came very close to the Shrew and attempted to pick it up by holding its tail. The shrew at once turned towards the cat and opened its gape emitting a deep whistling sound and jumped towards the cat to frighten it off. The cat seemed to become nervous, withdrew a few steps back, and then made several attempts to catch it again but was not successful to either injure it or hold its neck or tail due to the aggressive attitude of the shrew. The shrew was very agile and challenged the cat rushing to bite

it. This continued for nearly 4-5 minutes till it was able to move towards a bush nearby and hid under some weeds. The cat after a search of the area failed to find its prey, and it gave up the attempt and moved out of the area. Thus, the House Shrew escaped predation by the Domestic Cat. To further study the interaction another shrew trapped from the same locality was released in the same situation next morning at about 7 hours. The Domestic cat was unable to kill it since the shrew defended itself in a similar manner to the shrew of the previous day, and only when it found a suitable hiding place it quickly took the shelter. The shrew in this case went under broken brick-chips. Pradhan (1980) observed that because of its aggressive nature, and irrespective of its size and smell, the House Shrew managed to keep all the rats (*Bandicota indica*, *Bandicota bengalensis*, *Rattus rattus*) at bay. The above observations confirmed that the House Shrew is able to fend for itself from predator like the Domestic Cat by its sheer aggressive attitude.

REFERENCES

- BEHURA, B. K. (1958) : A Musk Shrew attacking a snake. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 55 : 552.
- BLANFORD, W. T. (1888) : The Fauna of British India. Taylor and Francis, London.

- DHARMAKUMARSINHJI, K. S. (1946) : Musk Shrew (*Suncus caeruleus*) attacking Bull Frog (*Rana tigrina*). *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 46 : 180.
- KHAJURIA, H. & GHOSAL, D. K. (1970) : Small mammals eaten by the Barn Owl, *Tyto alba* (Scopoli). *Mammalia*, 34 : 718-720, 1 tab.
- MCCANN, C. (1937) : Observation on the Grey Musk Shrew (*Suncus caeruleus*). *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 39 : 380.
- PRADHAN, M. S. (1980) : Interspecific relationship amongst the urban commensal species, 32-36, 1 fig., In : Ghosh, A. K. [Ed.]. Studies on rodents and their control. The Meghalaya Science Society, Shillong.
- SANJEEVA RAJ, P. J. (1959) : Musk Shrew feeding on leeches. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 56 : 624.
- VASU, V. M. (1946) : Musk Shrew (*Suncus caeruleus*) attacking a Bull Frog. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.*, 46 : 539.

Zoological Survey of India
8, Lindsay Street
Calcutta

D. K. BISWAS
AJOY KUMAR MANDAL
