

Prof ANIL KUMAR Zoology

B.Sc Part - III Paper - VII

Topic:- Describe the characteristic fauna
of Madagascar

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Q. B. Describe the characteristic fauna of Madagascar.

Ans. Madagascar lies about 260 miles from east coast of Africa in the Indian ocean. It covers an area of about 2,40,000 sq. miles. Geologically it is an ancient island, formed of granite plateau with scattered volcanic peaks. Its flora comprises of dense forest, jungles of bamboo, tropical swamps and even bare rocks and sand dunes.

Fauna—The fauna is rich and varied but it lacks varieties. Exclusive forms are large.

Mammals—Only Insectivora, Primata, Rodentia and Carnivora are present. The Insectivora has only one family—Terrecidae which comprises 30 species.

(i) Hedgehogs—An insectivorous mammal living in Eurasia and Africa. The most obvious thing about a hedgehog is its prickly coat, composed of numerous hardened hairs. These spines are found only on the upper surface, the lower surface being clothed with perfectly ordinary soft hair. Hedgehogs feed on a wide variety of small animals and plant food. In cooler regions they hibernate for the winter.

(ii) Mouse Moles—Small mammals related to hedgehogs and shrews which are confined to the northern hemisphere. They spend almost all their lives under the ground and have very strong front limbs with which they excavate their tunnels. Their eyes are almost useless, and the animals rely on the senses of smell and hearing. They feed mainly on earthworms, but also take insects.

Fossils of pigmy hippopotamus are known from pleistocene deposits. the primates are represented by three families of Lemur. They are ring tailed lemures, gentle lemurs, wholly lemurs.

The aye-aye is a squirrel like primate, closely related to lemurs, found only in the forest of Malagasy (Madagascar). Despite protection the aye-aye is in danger of extinction.

Besides these, murid mice, shrew and African bush pig are introduced recently.

Birds—Four families of birds are exclusive.

Giant elephant birds and rail like meso enatids are flightless birds of which former is being extinct.

Vangas and philopittas are exclusively flying birds.

Reptiles—Side neck turtles, land turtles, geckos, chameleons, skinks and spiny lizards are present. Iguanidae is also present.

Fishes—No fresh water fish.

The vertebrate fauna of Madagascar exhibits marked affinities with African fauna but some birds and amphibians also resemble with oriental forms. This indicates that Madagascar is an ancient island, which once has a continental connection either with Africa or India or both and had separated from them in the palaeocene or Eocene. It is more generally believed that Madagascar had a land connection only with Africa during mesozoic which permitted African amphibians, reptiles, birds and earliest mammals to enter Madagascar. The other mammals like ancestral insectivores, lemurs, viverrids, Cricetids, side-neck turtles and chameleons travelled to Madagascar for between Cretaceous and Eocene. Insects are comparatively scarce: of coleoptera 19 species are recorded, of Hymenoptera 11, of lepidoptera 26, Diptera 9, Hemiptera and orthoptera 9 each. All are common North American or west Indian species. The land molluscs comprise 28 species, six of which are peculiar.