Xerus inauris. By Douglas A. Skurski and Jane M. Waterman
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Xerus inauris (Zimmerman, 1780)
Cape Ground Squirrel

Sciurus inauris Zimmermann, 1780:344. Type locality “Bewohnt
die Cafferen, über hundert Meilen nordwärt's des Vorgeburges
der guten Hofnung . . .” translated, “Kaffirland, 100 miles
north of the Cape of Good Hope.”

Sciurus dachshinicus Gmelin, 1788:151. Type locality “In Prov-
incia Indiae Dachinchi” = South Africa.

Sciurus capensis Kerr, 1792:266. Type locality “near mountains of
the Sneeburgh, eight hundred miles north from the Cape
of Good Hope.”

Sciurus namaquensis Lichtenstein, 1793:2. No type locality given.

Restricted to “Orange River, Namaqualand” by Ellerman
(1940).

Sciurus ginginianus Shaw, 1801:147. Type locality “Gingi in the
East Indies” = South Africa.

Myoxus africanus Shaw, 1801:172. Type locality “mountains of
Sneeburgh, about 800 miles above the Cape of Good Hope.”

Sciurus albocinctus Desmarest, 1817:339. “Le Cap de Bonne-És-
pérance” = Cape of Good Hope.

Sciurus levaillantii Kuhl, 1820:67. Type locality “In Africa meri-
dionalis.”

Sciurus setosus Smuts, 1833:32. Type locality “Habitat hoc animal
in sylvis ac regionibus Coloniae inferioribus” = southern part
of Cape of Good Hope.


Xerus inauris: Ellerman et al. 1940:422. First use of current name
combination.

CONTEXT AND CONTENT. Order Rodentia, suborder
Sciuroidea, family Sciuridae, tribe Xerini, genus Xerus (O’Shea 1991). Xerus inauris is monotypic (Skinner and
Smithers 1990).

DIAGNOSIS. Xerus inauris (Fig. 1) lives sympatrically with
only 1 species of African ground squirrel, X. princeps. X. inauris
has white incisors, as opposed to yellow-orange in
X. princeps (Herzig-Straschil et al. 1991).

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Males has white incisors, as opposed to yellow-orange in
X. princeps (Herzig-Straschil et al. 1991).

General characters. Xerus inauris is covered with
short hair that is bristly and coarse, with no underfur. Dorsal parts
are cinnamon in color with lighter and darker individual variation.

Ventral parts of limbs, underbelly, sides of neck, and face are white,
and skin is black. Characteristic features include small, exterior
ear pinnae; white lateral stripe that extends from shoulder to thigh
on each side of body; dull white lines around prominent eyes; and
long (85% of length of head and body), dorsoventrally flattened
ear pinnae; white lateral stripe that extends from shoulder to thigh
on each side of body; dull white lines around prominent eyes; and
long (85% of length of head and body), dorsoventrally flattened
tail of males was based on 2 males and 9 females (Rautenbach 1982).

Average length (in mm) of selected external measurements for
males and females, respectively, are: total length, 452–476, 435–
446; length of head and body, 234–282, 233–248; length of tail,
194–211, 196–207; length of hind foot, 62–68, 64–66; length of
ear, 9–12, 9–13 (Bernard and Nutten 1995; Herzig-Straschil 1978;

DISTRIBUTION. Xerus inauris is endemic to arid, open
savannahs of southern Africa through Botswana, Republic of South
African, and Namibia (Fig. 3; Herzig-Straschil 1978). Cape ground
squirrels are widely distributed in Namibia except for coastal re-
gions and the northwest, where X. inauris is replaced by X. prince-
ps (Skinner and Smithers 1990). In Botswana, Cape ground squir-
rels occur in central and southwestern Kalahari (Smithers 1971).

In Republic of South Africa, Xerus inauris occurs in the southwest
region of North West Province, is widely endemic to the Free State
east to 30° and in western Lesotho, and is limited to the north and
northeast in Northern Cape Province. Graaff Reinet district marks
their southern-most limit (Skinner and Smithers 1990). Cape
ground squirrels were noted in Metebeleland, in southwestern Ro-
desia (now Zimbabwe—Salter 1901; Shortridge 1934; Straschil
1975). No reports of Xerus inauris in Zimbabwe have occurred
after 1975, and 1 report specifically excludes occurrences in Zim-
babwe (Lynch 1983).

FOSSIL RECORD. Xerus cf. inauris fossils are reported from
3 sites at Olduvai Bed I, Tanzania. Nine mandible fragments
with p4 or m1–3, 2 mandible fragments with 1 molar, and 14 iso-
lated molars are estimated to be 1.5–1.7 million years old (Denys
1990). The fossil Xerini from Olduvai Bed I are nearly indistin-
guishable in morphology from Xerus inauris (Denys 1990).

FORM AND FUNCTION. Nine transverse intermolar palatal
ridges are interrupted at midline to form a furrow with 2 con-
tinuous ridges anterior to molars (Eisenraut 1975). Dental formula
is i 1/1, c 0/0, p 1/1, m 3/3, total 20 (Zumpt 1970). Females have
2 pairs of mammary glands: 1 inguinal and 1 abdominal (de Graaff
1981; Zumpt 1970). Testes are ca. 20% of length of head and body
Waterman 1995; Zumpt 1970). Glans penis is relatively large,
turns downward at apex, and has a well-developed terminal bacu-
um. Baculum is ca. 8 mm in length and has a wide upper surface
shaped like a spearhead with convexly rounded sides (Pocock
1925). Moltling occurs once per year, between August and Sep-
tember and March and April (Herzig-Straschil 1978).

Xerus inauris rarely drinks and meets its minimal water re-
quirements through consumption of herbaceous vegetation. Water
is conserved metabolically by production of concentrated plasma,