

CASE STUDY 2

The Indian Mongoose*Indian Mongoose (Herpestes javanicus)*

THE INDIAN MONGOOSE grows to around 60 cm (24 inches) and lives as long as 13 years, although 3–4 years is more common in the wild. It is fast moving, and although it mainly eats insects, it will also eat crops, fruits, seeds, birds, eggs, small cats, snakes, frogs, and crabs. Usually solitary creatures, they sometimes live in groups, and their habitat ranges from scrubland to different types of forest to areas where humans live. They breed rapidly, with males able to father offspring when they are only four months old. Each female can produce two to five pups every year.

Seventy-three Indian Mongooses were intentionally introduced to the Hawaiian Islands in 1883. They were imported to eat rats that were destroying the sugar cane crops. However, rats tend to be most active during the night, whereas mongooses are most active during the day, so the plan did not work very well. The Indian Mongoose is suspected in causing the extinction of at least one species of bird in Hawaii, and it has killed significant numbers of other native species. As do many other animals, mongooses can carry rabies and leptospirosis. Leptospirosis is a bacterial disease that causes symptoms ranging from rashes to kidney and liver failure. Mongooses may transfer it to humans if the animals' urine mixes with water supplies. ■

Leptospirosis can be passed on to humans.

