

THE COLUGOS

Order Dermoptera

ORDER DERMOPTERA

The ordinal name, Dermoptera, literally means “skin winged ones” and refers to the extensive patagia of these animals (Fig. 13.1). Dermopterans are called colugos or “flying lemurs,” but *flying* is inaccurate because these animals glide but do not fly, and *lemur* is incorrect because true lemurs are in the order Primates. Colugo is the preferred common name.

Colugos are herbivorous, feeding upon the young leaves, buds, and fruits of trees in which they live. Adept gliders, they can cover great distances with little loss of altitude. When moving about in trees, they hang from their large curved claws and move in a slow, suspended quadrupedal fashion similar to that of sloths.

In some parts of their range, colugos are hunted for their meat and skins, but they are of little economic importance. No zoo has yet kept one alive for more than a few months (Schultze-Westrum 1975).

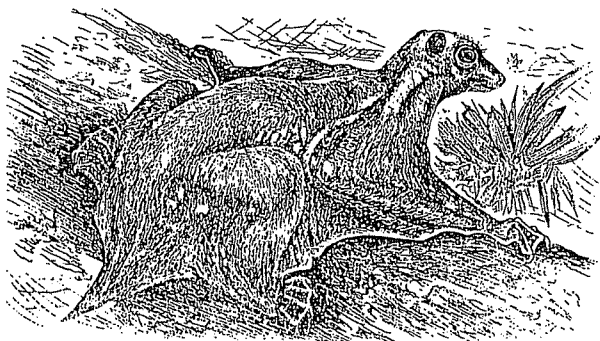


Figure 13.1 A colugo, *Cynocephalus*, Cynocephalidae.
(Ognev 1951)

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS

The dental formula is $2/3 \ 1/1 \ 2/2 \ 3/3 = 34$. The first upper incisors are small and widely separated (Fig. 13.2). The second upper incisors are caniniform. The first two lower incisors are pectinate (Fig. 13.3), each with from five to 20 long, slender cusps resembling the teeth of a comb. The third lower incisor has five or six cusps. The canines are incisiform, and the cheek teeth are brachyodont. The skull is broad and dorsoventrally flattened.

Well-developed and completely furred patagia extend from the sides of the neck, to the manual phalanges, to the pedal phalanges, and to the tail (see Figure 7.17).

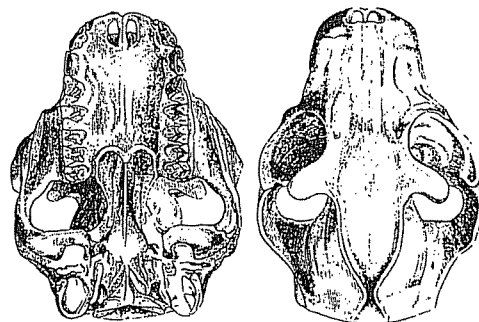


Figure 13.2 Ventral and dorsal views of the skull of a colugo, *Cynocephalus volans*.
(Giebel 1859)



Figure 13.3 The lower incisors of a colugo, *Cynocephalus variegatus*.

(Cabrera 1925)

LIVING FAMILY OF DERMOPTERA

There is one living family, **Cynocephalidae**, the colugos, with one genus, *Cynocephalus*, and two species (Wilson 1993). Colugos range through the tropical forests of southern Thailand and Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia,

and the southernmost Philippine Islands (Wilson 1993; Nowak 1999).

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS ON IDENTIFICATION

The colugo skin and skull are distinctive and not easily confused with those of any other mammals. Certain primates have pectinate lower incisors, but in these primates each tooth of the “comb” is a single incisor, whereas in colugos each tooth of the comb is only a single cusp of a large incisor. Colugos are the only gliding mammals with gliding membranes extending completely around the body from the sides of the neck to the tip of the tail.