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Author(s): Moore, S.

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**Ol' Yellow Belly – a problem with stoat ventral fur**  
**- Simon Moore, Hampshire CC Museums Service**

Something that has puzzled me for a long time now is why the ventral fur on stoats, including the dorsal fur during the ermine phase, gradually becomes yellow? The fur underneath and alongside the chin also under the front paws, however, stays its normal pale cream colour (Fig.1). By fixing stoat specimens in formaldehyde, this reaction is considerably catalysed and is even more dramatic, the fur taking on a deep golden colour within a few days.

The stoat's close relative, the weasel, is totally unaffected by this problem (right, Fig. 2), making any mustelid-related theories impossible!

I have had ideas put forward relating to leaching of gall bladder or other liver-related pigments into the skin but this would only apply to freeze-dried specimens since mounted bodies would have these organs removed by a taxidermist. Enzymes active after death have also been suggested and if crushed, some produce a pigment. Fine, except for the chin fur remaining non-discoloured, and the weasel?



demarcation zone

My own theories tend more towards:  
Light gradually affecting the fur in some way.  
That stoats have aldehyde sensitive ventral fur?

If anyone is able to analyse the yellow pigment please let me know and I will send a hair or two.

If anyone has any ideas or has heard of research being conducted into why stoat fur goes yellow, I would be most interested to hear.



stoat and unaffected weasel