

Report on assessing small cat Red List Assessments

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In recent years projects and resources for the conservation of small cats have increased remarkably. Nevertheless, small cat species receive considerably less attention than their larger relatives and are generally understudied. Information on these species is limited and not widely disseminated or easily accessible, which impedes the assessment for the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™. To identify knowledge gaps and to make sure that Red List Assessments RLAs are robust, streamlined and of the highest possible quality, the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group reviewed available information alongside the RLAs and compiled this comparison in a “Small Cat Report”. We evaluated the quality of information, the knowledge presented, and the consistency of the last RLA as well as any new information that has become available since the last RLA. Our analyses showed that a major challenge is the (very) limited data base for most species. Another problem is the inconsistent interpretation of certain RLA definitions and insufficient justification for the listing. The report should help in making future RLAs for the smaller cat species more consistent and better comparable, and may encourage people working on small cats to compile and share currently lacking information.

Notes on the behavioural ecology of red leopards in North West Province, South Africa

by R. J. Power, M. V. Botha, W. Boshoff, L. Venter, P. Bartels and L. Tensen

The rare red leopard phenotype is known from North West Province of South Africa, and is thought to have arisen from the exposure of recessive alleles, as a consequence of inbreeding due to overharvest. We documented red leopard records to date in the province, and based on satellite collared red leopards, appraised home-ranges, and the prospects of dispersal, while also examining behaviour via camera traps. Since 1976, seven records of red leopards were known for the province, where the prevalence within the bushveld ecoregion was ca. 4% since 2011 (n = 71). Home-ranges of red leopards showed both opportunistic philopatry, and immigration from elsewhere, suggesting gene spread. A red male leopard behaved as normal leopards would do and appeared dominant over another normal subadult male leopard after release, suggesting these leopards can defend territories. A record of a mature male leopard (> 7 years) north of the province suggested that longevity may not be compromised. The gene has likely remained masked in panmictic leopard populations, and only been exposed in fragmented subpopulations. This genetic variant should not receive prioritised attention as all leopards are equally vulnerable to systemic threats, and the threats may have resulted in gene fixation in the region.

New localities with first breeding record of the Eurasian lynx in Kurdistan Region, Iraq

S. H. Ahmed, K. Ararat and O. F. Al-Sheikhly

In Iraq, the Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx* is one of the rarest felines that is restricted to the Zagros Mountains range in northern Iraq (Kurdistan Region). Despite few sporadic historical records, its current status and distribution is still enigmatic. In this note, three new localities and the first breeding record of the Eurasian lynx in Iraq are provided. In addition, the species' potential threats and notes on its conservation are highlighted.

A noteworthy camera trap record of Asiatic wildcat from Pakistan

by Z. A. Shaikh, Q. Burfat and Z. Ahmed

We report a camera trap record of the Asiatic wildcat *Felis lybica ornata* from Khar Centre, Kirthar National Park, Sindh, Pakistan. A singular photograph was taken close to human habitation on the outskirts of Karachi city during a camera trapping session targeted to capture Caracals *Caracal caracal* and Jungle cats *Felis chaus*. This record warrants further investigation and necessary conservation inputs due to its proximity to human settlements.

Photographic evidence of melanistic leopard in Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary, India

by P. S. Mallik, K. Sarangi, S. S. Khora, N. C. Palei and B. P. Rath

Melanistic leopards *Panthera pardus* have been frequently observed in parts of South and South-east Asia and occasionally in India. Using camera trap survey of large carnivores in Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary, Odisha. We deployed 74 camera traps at in Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary during 10 May to 13 July 2023 with a total sampling effort of 1,850 trap days. Out of 39,855 camera trap photographs, we obtained five photographs of melanistic leopards were recorded from the Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary. Here, we provide photographic evidence of the melanistic leopards in Baisipalli Wildlife Sanctuary-, eastern India.

Reconfirming the presence of the Asiatic golden cat in Manas National Park, Assam, India

by D. Lahkar, M. F. Ahmed, A. C. Sarmah, R. H. Begum, A. Singh, N. Medhi, N. Kalita, S. K. Das and A. Harihar

Following the end of the ethnopolitical conflict in Manas National Park, Assam, we have reconfirmed the presence of the Asiatic golden cat *Catopuma temminckii*. Despite the species expected to occur in the region based on a direct sighting made in 2007, an intensive annual systematic camera trapping effort of 39,700 trap days over eight years between 2011 and 2018 yielded no records. Nevertheless, two photographic captures of the species were made in December 2019 and January 2021, reconfirming its presence in the park.

First photographic record of fishing cat in Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, India

by S. K. Das, P. Bora, A. Sharma, A. Sarmah, N. Das, P. Chanchani and J. Naiding

The fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus* is a nocturnal, elusive felid that primarily inhabits riverine wet landscapes. We provide photographic evidence of the felid's occurrence from the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, India, for the first time. It is an area dominated by alluvial grasslands and riparian forests and is situated in the floodplains of the Brahmaputra River. Documentation of this flagship feline has implications for the conservation management of Pobitora's alluvial habitat which is highly threatened by anthropogenic pressures including conversion of forest land, fragmented habitat, high grazing pressure, and siltation of natural wetlands.

Recent photographic evidence for the highest altitudinal record of tiger from India

by A. Singh, S. Sukumaran and P. Sathiyaselvam

The Bombay Natural History Society BNHS team has been conducting biodiversity assessment surveys in the high-altitude region of Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary PWS in the eastern Himalayas. As a part of the biodiversity assessment survey, camera traps were deployed from 2,000 m to 4,100 m in PWS. Camera traps were set up at strategic lo-ca-tions based on sign surveys, and 11 mammal species were photo-captured, in-clud-ing the tiger *Panthera tigris* at an altitude of 3,640 m, the highest elevation record of the species- from India. Other species recorded included the Endangered Himalayan musk deer *Moschus leucogaster* and Near Threatened Asiatic golden cat *Catopuma temminckii* and Himalayan goral *Naemorhedus goral*. The occurrence record is signifi-cant as it represents the first tiger habitat near the human settlement at this altitude in Sikkim. If the habitat is not monitored, then it may lead towards human-wildlife conflict in future. The photo-captured region also is surrounded by army bases and often there are road developmental projects going on for army convoys. The presence of the tiger will help showcase the importance of the photo-captured habitat of the tiger to the army and other defence forces and shall help prevent further fragmentation of this habitat.

Rusty-spotted cat sightings in Central Gujarat landscape and potential risks to its habitat

H. J. Patel, S. Amin, V. Thakur, H. Pagi and S. Tapadar

Preliminary research was conducted in four districts of Central Gujarat (Vadodara, Panchmahal, Chhota Udepur, and Dahod) to examine the current condition and threats to the rusty-spotted cats *Prionailurus rubiginosus*. We reported ten sightings and a road kill of the species over the last five years (2017–2021). According to the findings, the two

protected areas and reserve forests of Chhota Udepur provide the best habitat for the rusty-spotted cat. However, the area is under threat from highway building and mining. As a result, the current study adds to the data on the species and serves as a baseline for future studies on RSC in the Central Gujarat region.

Distribution of felids along the Gandaki River Basin in Nepal

by H. Basnet, K. Thapa, S. Thapa, S. Dahal, S. Shreshta, A. Subba, D. C. Thakuri, T. Pun, B. Achhami, K. Khanal and S. R. Jnawali

This study was conducted in 12 long-term climate change monitoring plots in the Chitwan-Annapurna Landscape, Nepal. A rapid survey resulted in 54 mammal species, including felids. Four felid species: tiger *Panthera tigris*, leopard *Panthera pardus*, leopard- cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*, and jungle cat *Felis chaus*, were recorded by camera trap survey, while snow leopard was recorded through indirect evidence. Leopard cats are the most abundant, and leopard is the most distributed cat in our study area. This paper adds information on cat occurrence and distribution patterns from the Inner-Tarai to Trans-Himalaya in Gandaki River Basin in Chitwan Annapurna Landscape, which will help to evaluate the priorities for conservation action and, where necessary, in formulating appropriate management. Monitoring plots provides a strategic advantage over long-term monitoring of the population and distribution of felids in the landscape.

First verified evidence of Eurasian lynx and Pallas's cat in Humla, Nepal

by G. Werhahn, S. Gurung, T. Lama, K. Tamang, K. S. Tamang, S. Pathak, G. Pant, K. Timalisina and N. Kusi

We present novel evidence of Pallas's cat *Otocolobus manul* and Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx* in Upper Humla, Nepal, through camera trap images. The IUCN distribution range for the two cat species indicates that both occur in northwestern Nepal, however no specific evidence for either species' presence in the region has been available to date. We covered a study area of 336 km² with 61 camera traps run for 3,145 camera trap nights from July to October 2021 and 61 camera traps run for 3,139 camera trap nights from May to August 2022. For the year 2021, this resulted in two independent captures for Pallas's cat (of which one captured two adults with a cub) and three independent captures for Eurasian lynx, and for the year 2022 in one independent capture of Eurasian lynx. These findings provide distribution updates for the Pallas's cat and Eurasian lynx in Nepal and indicate the need for more focused research into the population status and ecology of these cats in the country. The findings further underline the importance to rapidly implement gripping protection to the biodiverse and unique Upper Humla landscape in close collaboration with local communities.