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First photographic record of Asiatic wildcat in Bandhavgarh TR, India

The Asiatic wildcat *Felis silvestris ornata* is one of five subspecies of the wildcat *Felis silvestris* listed as Least Concern in the IUCN Red list. Being previously unreported in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve TR, we provide here the first photographic evidences of Asiatic wildcat in Bandhavgarh TR from a camera trap survey. During subsequent camera trapping, we recorded kittens of Asiatic wildcat, strongly suggesting the existence of a breeding population in Bandhavgarh TR.

We report a first photographic record of Asiatic wildcat in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, India (Fig. 1). The Asiatic wildcat is considered as one of five subspecies of the wildcat *Felis silvestris* which is listed as Least Concern in the IUCN Red List (Yamaguchi et al. 2015). The Asiatic wildcat is legally protected in India under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972). The Asiatic wildcat occurs in a wide variety of habitats ranging from arid, semi-arid, scrubs, steppes, savannas and cultivated areas throughout West, Central and South Asia (Nowell & Jackson 1996, Menon 2014). In India, the species is restricted mainly to the regions of western and Central India (Menon 2014) and has previously been reported from Pench Tiger Reserve (Mukherjee 1998). The Asiatic wildcat is in its general appearance very similar to the domestic cat *Felis catus* with no external sexual dimorphism. The species is sympatric with the jungle cat *Felis chaus* in Bandhavgarh National Park. To our knowledge, this capture is the first documentation of this species in Bandhavgarh TR. A total of 35 camera trap units were used in buffer zone of Bandhavgarh TR which extends over an area of 820 km². Camera traps remained active only during the night for a period of 6-8 months over a year. At each location, a pair of cameras was set to photograph each flank of any passing animal, with an average distance of 1-1.5 km between any two consecutive cameras. Camera trapping was part of a large research project focussing on the ecology of tiger and other co-predators in Bandhavgarh TR.

The species was first recorded on 28 January 2016 at a site located at 23°35'54.2" N / 81°09'51.4" E having an elevation of 315 m (Fig. 2). Additionally, we recorded an Asiatic wildcat with two kittens

(Fig. 3) on 6 May 2016 at a site located at 23°49'6.7" N / 80°56'11.7" E at an elevation of 411 m. During the study period of six months we recorded the Asiatic wildcat on 15 occasions at different camera trap stations in habitats ranging from well wooded Sal forests, mixed forests to scrubs and around human habitations. Information on their status, range, distribution and ecology are lacking in India and most of the information comes from opportunistic sightings. The species seems to be nocturnal in nature. Feral cats occur at higher density in the study area especially around human habitations, which increases their probability of cross-breeding with Asiatic wildcat. Proper and well designed studies are required to understand the current status, distribution and ecology of the Asiatic wildcat.

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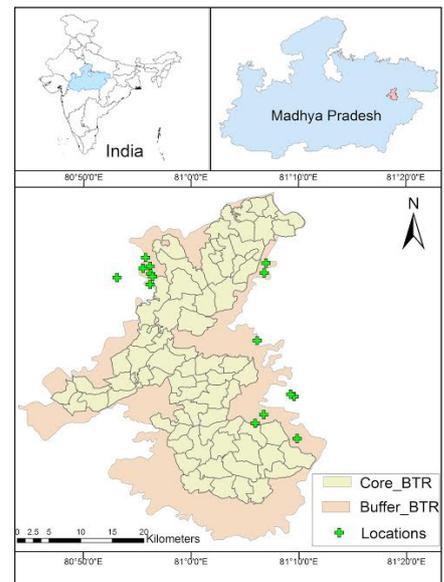


Fig. 1. Map of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve and camera trap locations of Asiatic wildcat (TCF, Bandhavgarh).



Fig. 2. Asiatic wildcat caught in camera trap (Photo TCF, Bandhavgarh).



Fig. 3. Asiatic wildcat with kittens caught in camera trap (Photo TCF Bandhavgarh).

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