

CAT

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news





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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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West Bengal, India
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First photographic record of rusty-spotted cat from Thane Forest Division, India

The rusty-spotted cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* is the world's smallest cat species and is endemic to India, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Being previously unreported, we present the first camera trap record of rusty-spotted cat from Thane Forest Division, Maharashtra, India. The species was captured in a camera trap survey aimed to prepare the biodiversity profile of the Thane Forest Division from April to June 2018.

The rusty-spotted cat is the world's smallest cat species weighing around 1.1–1.6 kg when fully adult (Prater 2005). It has a relatively restricted global distribution and is endemic to India, Sri Lanka and Nepal (Mukherjee et al. 2016). The rusty-spotted cat is listed as Near Threatened in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Mukherjee et al. 2016) and is legally protected under Schedule-I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. Little is known of its ecology or local abundance (Nowell & Jackson 1996, Sunquist & Sunquist 2002, Mukherjee et al. 2016). The rusty-spotted cat is restricted to the unprotected forest area across most of its distributional range and thus is highly susceptible to the various anthropogenic threats (Palai & Debata 2017). In India, rusty spotted-cat occurs intermittently from Tamil Nadu in the south to the Jammu and Kashmir in the north, and from Gujarat in the west to Odisha in the east through

Madhya Pradesh in the central region (Patel & Jackson 2005, Mali & Srinivasulu 2015, Nayak et al. 2017). The rusty-spotted cat is a generalist in its choice of habitat and in India, occurs in moist and dry deciduous forests, tropical thorn forests, arid scrub-lands, rocky areas and hilly areas (Mukherjee et al. 2016). Its main diet constitutes of rodents, small birds and possibly small insects, lizards and frogs (Philips 1984, De Alwis 1973).

Results and Discussion

Here, we report a first photographic record of the rusty-spotted cat in Thitabi, in the reserved forests of Tokawade Range, Thane Forest Division, Maharashtra (Fig. 1). To our knowledge, this is the first photographic record of the species from the Thane Forest Division. A total of 6 camera traps, at the spacing of 800–1,000 m from each other, were installed from 28 May to 18 June 2018 across

an area of 16 km². The rusty-spotted cat was recorded on 14 June 2018 at a site located at 19°20'40.0"N / 73°46'89.1" E (Fig. 1, 2). No further captures of the species were recorded during the survey as its nocturnal and partially arboreal behavior makes the species hard to detect (Jayaratne et al. 2015).

Previously, the species has been recorded in Amboli, a part of the Western Ghats, Maharashtra (Lele & Chuneekar 2013). The study area connects the forests of Harishchandragarh-Kalsubai Wildlife Sanctuary and some parts of the Western Ghats. Thus, the study area may also act as corridor for the wildlife in the area. The study area faces high anthropogenic pressures such as increasing agriculture, grazing and hunting. Due to its irregular distribution in India and its occurrence outside protected forest area, habitat loss and spread of cultivation fields and deforestation are believed to be major threats to the species (Nowell & Jackson 1996). Increasing network of roads is also one of the major threats to the species as reports of rusty-spotted cats killed in road accidents have been documented (Tehsin 1994, Digveerendrasinh 1995, Dubey 1999). The possibility of hybridisation of rusty-spotted cat with a domestic cat has also been suggested as a concern (Kittle & Watson 2004).

Although we present only one confirmation of the presence of rusty-spotted cat, it still provides crucial information on the occurrence of the species in the Thane Forest Division. However, it requires further study on its distribution across its range in Maharashtra. This record further shows the occurrence of a Near Threatened species like rusty-spotted cat in fragmented landscapes which often do not fall under protected forest areas.

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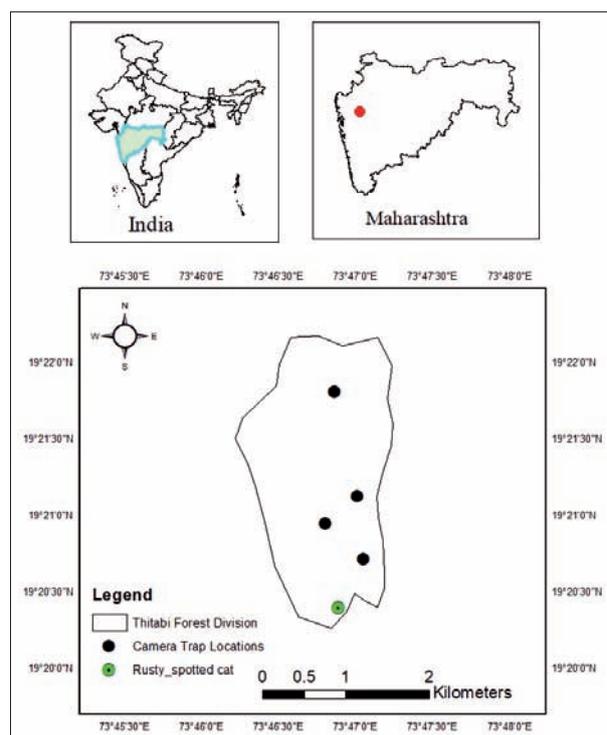


Fig. 1. Location of the study area within Maharashtra, camera trap locations and the site where rusty-spotted cat was pictured.

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Fig. 2. Camera trap photo of the rusty-spotted cat captured in Thitabi, Tokawade Range, Thane Forest Division (Photo The Corbett Foundation).

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