


Fishing Cat

Fishing Cat^[1]



Conservation status

Extinct

EW

EX

Threatened

CR

EN

VU

Least Concern

NT

LC

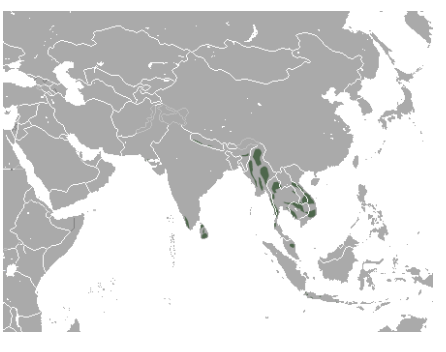
Endangered (IUCN 3.1)^[2]

Scientific classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Genus:	<i>Prionailurus</i>
Species:	<i>P. viverrinus</i>

Binomial name

Prionailurus viverrinus
(Bennett, 1833)

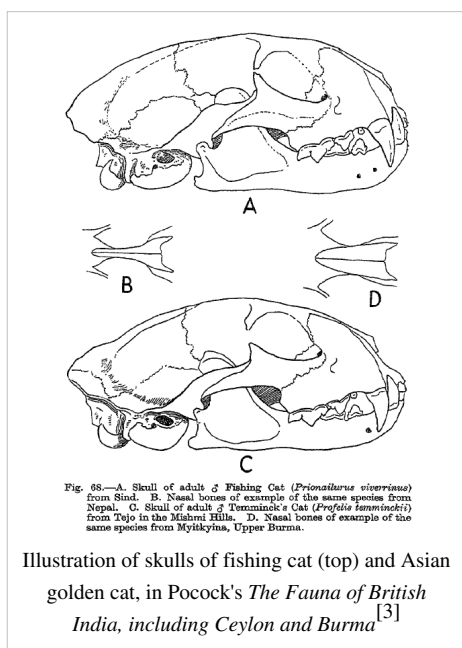


Fishing cat range

The **Fishing Cat** (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) is a medium-sized wild cat of South and Southeast Asia. In 2008, the IUCN classified the fishing cat as endangered since they are concentrated primarily in wetland habitats, which are increasingly being settled, degraded and converted. Over the last decade, the fishing cat population throughout much of its Asian range declined severely.^[2]

Like its closest relative, the leopard cat, the fishing cat lives along rivers, streams and mangrove swamps. It is well adapted to this habitat, being an eager and skilled swimmer.

Characteristics



The fur of fishing cats is olive-grey with dark spots arranged in horizontal streaks running along the length of the body. The underside is white, and the back of the ears are black with central white spots. There are a pair of dark stripes around the throat, and a number of black rings on the tail. An adult fishing cat is about twice the size of a domestic cat, with a head and body length that typically ranges from 57 to 78 cm (22 to 31 in), and a 20 to 30 cm (7.9 to 12 in) long tail. A few much larger individuals have been reported, of up to 115 cm (45 in) in head-body length. Adult fishing cats weigh from 5 to 16 kilograms (11 to 35 lb). They have a stocky, muscular build with medium to short legs, and a short tail of one half to one third the length of the rest of the animal. The face is elongated with a distinctly flat nose and ears set far back on the head.^[4]

The toes on the front feet are partially webbed, and the tips of the claws protrude from their sheaths even when fully retracted.^[5] Their feet are less completely webbed than of Leopard cats, their claws incompletely sheathed.^[6] The inter-digital webs help them gain better

traction in muddy environments and water.

Distribution and habitat

The range of fishing cats extends from eastern Pakistan through the Terai region of the Himalayan foothills in India and Nepal, into Bangladesh, and in Sri Lanka. There are no confirmed records from Peninsular Malaysia, and Vietnam.^[2] The island of Java constitutes the eastern limit of their range, but already in the 1990s they were scarce and apparently restricted to tidal forests with sandy or muddy shores, older mangrove stands, and abandoned mangrove plantation areas with fishponds.^[7] In March 2003, a single fishing cat was camera trapped in Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary, northern Cambodia.^[8] In January 2008, their presence was confirmed in Botum-Sakor National Park, southwest Cambodia.^[9] Populations have also been documented in Thailand.^[10] But there are no confirmed records from Laos.^[11]

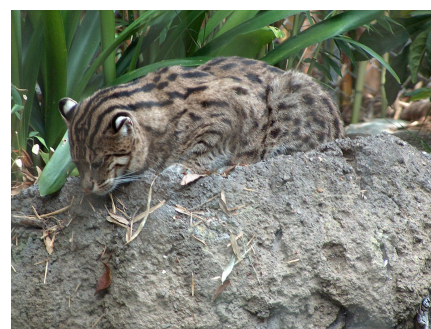
They are strongly associated with wetland, and are typically found in swamps and marshy areas, oxbow lakes, reed beds, tidal creeks and mangrove areas and are more scarce around smaller, fast-moving watercourses. Along watercourses they have been recorded at elevations up to 1525 m (5003 ft) in the Indian Himalayas, but most records are from lowland areas. Although fishing cats are widely distributed through a variety of habitat types including both evergreen and tropical dry forest, their occurrence tends to be highly localized.^[12]

Ecology and behavior

The solitary living fishing cats are thought to be primarily nocturnal. They are very much at home in the water and can swim long distances, even under water. Females have been reported to range over areas of 4 to 6 km² (1.5 to 2.3 sq mi), while males range over 16 to 22 km² (6.2 to 8.5 sq mi). Adults have been observed to make a "chuckling" sound and likely have other calls similar to those of domestic cats.^[4]

As the name implies, fish is their main prey. A one-year study of scats in India's Keoladeo National Park found that fish comprised 76% of the diet, followed by birds (27%), insects (13%) and small rodents (9%). Molluscs, reptiles and amphibians are also taken.^[13] They hunt along the edges of watercourses, grabbing prey from the water, and sometimes diving in to catch prey further from the banks.^[14]

They mark their territory using cheek-rubbing, head rubbing, chin rubbing, neck rubbing and urine-spraying to leave scent marks. They also sharpen their claws and display flehmen.^[15]



A fishing cat at the San Diego Zoo. Note the ocelli on the backs of the cat's ears.

Reproduction and development

Fishing cats may mate at any time of the year, although most commonly between January and February. The female constructs a den in a secluded area such as a dense thicket of reeds, and gives birth to two to three kittens after a gestation period of 63–70 days. The kittens weigh around 170 g (6.0 oz) at birth, and are able to actively move around by the age of one month. They begin to play in water and to take solid food at about two months, but are not fully weaned for six months. They reach full adult size at around eight and a half months, acquire their adult canine teeth at eleven months, and are sexually mature at fifteen months. They live for up to ten years in captivity.^[4]

Threats

Fishing cat are endangered due to their dependence on wetlands, which are increasingly being settled and converted for agricultural use, and also due to human over-exploitation of local fish stocks. It is believed to be extirpated in Afghanistan, it may already be gone from Malaysia and China, and it has become rare throughout its remaining distribution range.^[2]

Conservation

Prionailurus viverrinus is included on CITES Appendix II, and protected by national legislation over most of its range. Hunting is prohibited in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand. Hunting regulations apply in Lao PDR. In Bhutan and Vietnam, the species is not protected outside protected areas.^[12]

In captivity

Fishing cat captive breeding programmes have been established by the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria and the American Association of Zoos and Aquariums. All the fishing cats kept in zoos around the world are listed in the International Studbook of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Local names

In Sri Lanka, the fishing cat is known as *Handun Diviya* or *Kola Diviya*,^[16] terms that are also used by the local community to refer to the Rusty-spotted Cat (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*), another little-known small cat in suburban areas of Sri Lanka. As both animals are nocturnal and elusive, it is usually uncertain which species is referred to by either of these terms in any given usage.^[17]

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External links

- Fishing Cat Working Group (<http://www.fishing-cat.wild-cat.org>)
 - Fishing Cat Research and Conservation Project in Thailand (<http://www.fishingcatproject.info/>)
 - ARKive: *Prionailurus viverrinus* with images and movies (http://www.arkive.org/species/GES/mammals/Prionailurus_viverrinus/)
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