

## The six small cats of Orissa

LN Acharjyo

THE STATE OF Orissa has a geographical area of 1,55,707 sq km, with an actual forest cover of 47,107 sq km (30.3%) including 195 sq km of mangrove forests (Anon. 1996). The forests are unevenly distributed and this is the main reason for the concentration of wild animals in certain areas and their absence in others. The Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 was promulgated in the state in August 1974, and a separate wildlife wing within the state forest department was created in June 1976. There are 18 wildlife sanctuaries and two proposed national parks, covering an area of 6677.50 sq km in the state. The percentage of protected areas to geographical and forest areas of the state equals 4.10 and 10.37 respectively, (Anon., 1997).

Of the 11 species of small cats in India, six species are known to occur in Orissa. Each sanctuary has one or more species of small cats. The proposed national parks - Similipal and Bhitarkanika have three species of small cats each, namely the Leopard cat, Fishing cat and Jungle cat. Here is provided information on the occurrence and status of these species in Orissa.

### JUNGLE CAT (*Felis chaus*)

This is the most common small cat distributed all over the state (Behura and Guru, 1969; Mishra et al., 1996). It has been reported from the

districts of Cuttack, Khurda, Kalahandi, Rayagada and Sundergarh (Das et al., 1993). Of and on, there have been reports from different parts of the state on depredation of the poultry by the Jungle cat. Between 1963 and 1992, eighteen (7 males and 11 females) individuals have been received at the Nandankanan zoological park, mostly from nearby areas and two kittens from Rayagada (Rayagada district). Within the zoo itself, many Jungle cats have been captured with the help of traps, as they frequently attack zoo birds through the cage barriers.

*Current status* : Included in Part II, Schedule II of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act., 1972. There appears to be no immediate danger to this species as it is able to thrive in different habitats, including mangrove areas.

### LEOPARD CAT (*Prionailurus bengalensis*)

The Leopard cat is found in all the forests of the state (Behura and Guru, 1969), particularly in the forests of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, undivided Koraput, Puri, Cuttack and Ganjam districts (Mishra et al., 1996). Between 1966 and 1992, eighteen (11 males and 7 females) individuals of this species were received at the Nandankanan zoo from different areas of Similipal forests (Mayurbhanj district), Chitrakonda (Malkangiri district), Parlakhemundi (Gajapati

---

Author is  
Retd. Veterinary Officer,  
Nandankanan Zoo, Orissa

district). Anandapur (Keonjhar district), Balugaon (Khurda district) and Nawarangpur (Nawarangpur district). In 1996, one individual was seen by the author inside Bhitarkanika (Kendrapara district).

*Current status* : Included in Schedule I of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Appendix I of CITES. Designated as "vulnerable" in the Red Data Book. Habitat loss is the main reason for its decline in the wild.

FISHING CAT (*Prionailurus viverrinus*)

Fishing cat is restricted to Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Puri districts, Bhitarkanika, Chilika and other coastal areas (Mishra et. al., 1996). Its occurrence in Orissa was reported for the first time by Acharjyo and Mishra (1975) from the Keonjhar district. Seven individuals (5 males and 2 females) were received at Nandankanan zoo from the forests near Anandpur (Keonjhar district), Balugaon (Khurda district), Nimapara and Chandanpur (Puri district), Bhitarkanika (Kendrapara district) and Similipal tiger reserve (Mayurbhanj district) during the period 1961-1992.

*Current status* Included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix II of CITES. Designated as "vulnerable" in the Red Data Book. Their number in the state is declining due to killing and habitat loss (Mishra et. al., 1996).

RUSTY SPOTTED CAT (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*) : Two (one male and one female) kittens of this species were collected from the forests of Daringibadi block in Phulbani district and received at the Nandankanan zoo in February 1995. Initially, they were identified as Leopard cat kittens. The male died within one month, but the

female has since matured and has been identified as Rusty spotted cat on the basis of its size and colour pattern (Acharjyo et. al., 1997). This was the first report of its occurrence in Orissa (Behura and Guru, 1969; Das et. al., 1993, Mishra et. al., 1996).

*Current status* : Included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. With only a single report of its occurrence, studies are necessary on its status in Orissa.

MARBLED CAT (*Pardofelis marmorata*)

Two individuals of this species were reportedly captured in Phulbani forests and brought to the first wildlife exhibition held at Bhubaneshwar in 1956. But since then there has been no further report on its existence in the state (Anon., 1969; Mishra et. al., 1996).

*Current status* : Included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix I of CITES. Designated as "endangered" in the Red Data Book. Current existence doubtful since it has been reported only once, 42 years ago.

CARACAL (*Caracal caracal*)

On the basis of a newspaper report published in The Statesman, Calcutta of 18 April 1962. Behura and Duru (1969) reported the occurrence of Caracal in the Mayurbhanj district. But there have been no other reports of its occurrence in the state nor has any individual been received at the Nandankanan zoo from any part of Orissa.

*Current status* : Included in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and in Appendix I of CITES. Designated as "endangered" in the Red Data Book. Present occurrence in the state is doubtful.

CONCLUSION

Attempts have been made to breed the common of the small cats, namely Fishing cat, Leopard cat and Jungle cat in captivity at the Nandankanan zoo. But these have been successful only in the case of the Leopard cat and Jungle cat. Studies on the management, feeding, breeding habits, longevity, diseases and parasites of the small cat species in captivity have been carried out at the zoo from time to time and their findings published in reputed Indian journals.

**References**

ACHARJYO, L.N. and R. MISHRA (1975) - Occurrence of fishing cat (*Felis viverrina*) in Orissa. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 72 (1) : 195-196.

ACHARJYO L.N., K.L. PUROHIT and S.K. PATNAIK (1997) - Occurrence of the rusty spotted cat (*Felis rubiginosa*) in Orissa. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 94 (3) : 554-555.

ANON (1997) - Wildlife - Orissa, 1997. Forest Department, Orissa, Cuttack.

ANON (1996) - The state of forest report - 1995. Government of India, Forest Survey of India, Dehra Dun.

ANON (1997) - Wildlife - Orissa : At a glance. Wildlife Wing, Forest Department, Govt of Orissa, Bhubaneswar, pp. 9.

BEHURA, B.K. and G.B. GURU (1969) - Wildlife of Orissa. *Prakriti - Utkal University Journal - Science*, 6 (2):95-96.

DAS, P.K., J.P. LAL and V.C. AGRAWAL (1993) - Mammalia. State Fauna Series - I: Fauna of Orissa, Part 4: *Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta*, 143-180.

MISHRA, CH.G., S.K. PATNAIK, S.K. SINHA, C.S. KAR, S.K. KAR and L.A.K. SINGH (1996) - Wildlife Wealth of Orissa, Wildlife Wing, Forest Department, Government of Orissa, Bhubaneswar.