

Records of small cats in Gujarat

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IN ALL, FIVE species of small cats occur in Gujarat. But no studies have been carried out on any of these and there are only some records of their sightings, documented by scientists and nature lovers. In the absence of proper studies, it would not be possible to indicate the changes in their population and distribution, but nature lovers feel that their populations and range of distribution have declined everywhere, except in Gir wildlife sanctuary and national park. This decline has been largely due to the loss of habitat. Although the creation of protected areas has somewhat helped preserve their habitats in some regions, the state government has not taken up any specific measure to conserve the small cats.

The following are the small cat species found in Gujarat.

CARACAL (*Caracal caracal*)

This species once occurred in good numbers in the scrub forest, grassland (*vidi*) and thorn forest habitats in the Saurashtra and Kutch regions. But with the degradation of these habitats, the scenario has changed and it is now rarely seen. In 1996, Dr YV Jhala (Wildlife Institute of India) sighted and photographed Caracal in Kutch. A forester also recorded this species in a grassland in Saurashtra. In 1997, a forest official reported the sighting of this cat on *baet* in the Little Rann of Kutch. A study team comprising members from Gujarat

Ecological Education and Research Foundation (Gandhinagar) and Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (Bhuj) sighted Caracal twice in the Narayan Sarovar wildlife sanctuary, in February and March 1998. Sightings are rare and a few animals may be surviving in this part of the state, but overall, the Caracal is facing a high degree of threat and can be considered endangered in Gujarat.

DESERT CAT (*Felis silvestris ornata*)

In Gujarat, the Desert cat inhabits the grasslands, thorn forests, savannah type vegetation and scrub forests. Past records indicate that this cat was found in Saurashtra, Kutch and north Gujarat. Although its distribution has not been studied properly and its sightings are rare, information from various sources indicates that it still occurs in some of its old habitats in Saurashtra and Kutch.

RUSTY SPOTTED CAT

(*Prionailurus rubiginosus*)

In the absence of any proper study on Rusty spotted cat, it is difficult to compare the status and distribution of the species in different parts of the state. However, Pathak (1990) made a confirmed report and photographed it in Gir in May 1990. A kitten was also found in Gimar after the first record in Gir. The animal has since been sighted and photographed over half a dozen times in Gir. Similarly, this cat has also been recorded in Shoolpaneshwar wildlife sanctuary

and Vansada national park. It appears that the Rusty spotted cat is also found in the forests of south Gujarat and Girnar and its occurrence in Panchmahal and Sabarkantha regions also cannot be ruled out.

LEOPARD CAT (*Prionailurus bengalensis*)

The only record of this cat is of Dr SA Chavan sighting an individual in Shoolpaneshwar wildlife sanctuary. It is difficult to map the distribution of this species as it has not been studied. However, its occurrence in very small numbers in the forests of south Gujarat is not ruled out.

JUNGLE CAT (*Felis chaus*)

The Jungle cat is found throughout Gujarat, in thick to open forests, grasslands, scrub forests, ravines and

bushlands. It is particularly common in Gir, Girnar and the forests of south and north Gujarat. As in the case of other wildlife, this animal too is adversely affected due to the degradation of its habitat.

References

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