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NOTE

PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF THE RUSTY-SPOTTED CAT *PRIONAILURUS RUBIGINOSUS* (I. GEOFFROY SAINT-HILAIRE, 1831) (MAMMALIA: CARNIVORA: FELIDAE) IN SOUTHERN WESTERN GHATS, INDIA

Devika Sanghamithra & P.O. Nameer

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SMALL WILD CATS SPECIAL SERIES

Photographic record of the Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* (I. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1831) (Mammalia: Carnivora: Felidae) in southern Western Ghats, India

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A Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* was photographed (Images 1,2) on 8 December 2018 in a dry deciduous forest in Walayar Reserve Forest, Palakkad district in the state of Kerala (Figure 1) during a survey on small carnivores. Camera traps with passive infra-red sensors and motion detectors were used for the study that lasted from 4 December 2018 to 10 January 2019. A total of 31 camera trap stations (Figure 1) were identified based on indirect evidence of small carnivores. The camera traps were installed at a height of 30cm from the ground and with a distance of at least 250m between two stations. They were kept active for 24 hours for 38 days with a total effort of 1,178 camera trap days.

The Walayar Reserve Forest extends over 125.65km², of which 30km² is dry deciduous habitat that we surveyed only. The major tree species in this dry deciduous patch include *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Alangium salvifolium*, *Careya arborea*, *Tectona grandis*, *Buchanania axillaris*, *Garuga pinnata*, *Cassia fistula*, *Strebulus asper*, *Holarhena pubescens*, and *Clerodendrum infortunatum*.

The other mammal species recorded by the camera

traps during the study were Bonnet Macaque *Macaca radiata*, Tufted Grey Langur *Semnopithecus priam*, Asian Elephant *Elephas maximus*, Mouse Deer *Moschiola indica*, Barking Deer *Muntiacus muntjak*, Sambar Deer *Rusa unicolor*, Spotted Deer *Axis axis*, Gaur *Bos gaurus*, Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*, Common Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*, Small Indian Civet *Viverricula indica*, Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithii*, Stripe-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis*, Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*, Tiger *Panthera tigris*, Leopard *P. pardus*, Dhole *Cuon alpinus*, Black-naped Hare *Lepus nigricollis*, and Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica*.

The Rusty-spotted Cat is a small felid that is endemic to India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal (Mukherjee et al. 2016). Along with the Black-footed Cat *Felis nigripes*, it is among the world's smallest cat species (Sunquist & Sunquist 2009). Since the Rusty-spotted Cat was recorded only once during the entire study period, we assume that it is rare in our study area. Our record of the Rusty-spotted Cat is consistent with its habitat use documented in eastern Gujarat (Patel 2006), Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger

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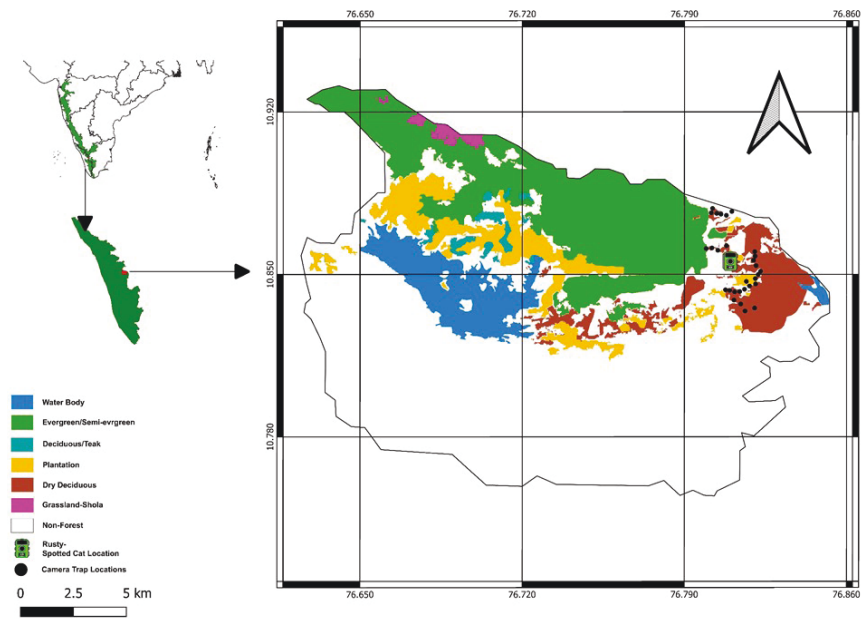


Figure 1. Location of Walayar Reserve Forest in Western Ghats, Kerala, India.



Image 1 & 2. Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* recorded in Walayar Reserve Forest on 8 December 2018. © Devika Sanghamithra & P.O. Nameer.



Image 3. A camera trap placed in the dry deciduous habitat in Walayar Reserve Forest. © Devika Sanghamithra & P.O. Nameer

Reserve in Chhattisgarh (Basak et al. 2018), Anaikatty Reserve Forest in Tamil Nadu (Mukherjee & Koparde 2014), and in the Aravalli Hills in Rajasthan (Sharma & Dhakad 2020; Singh & Kariyappa 2020). Elsewhere in India, it was also recorded in dry thorn forest, scrub forest, moist deciduous forest, semi-evergreen hill forest and sugarcane fields (Anwar et al. 2012; Kalle et al. 2013; Aditya & Ganesh 2016; Ghaskadbi et al. 2016; Bora et al. 2020; Chatterjee et al. 2020; Deshmukh et al. 2020; Sharma & Dhakad 2020; Silva et al. 2020).

In Kerala, it is present in Periyar Tiger Reserve, Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary, and Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (Shameer et al. 2019). The species is listed as 'Near Threatened' in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Mukherjee et al. 2016) and is protected in India under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (Acharjyo 1998). The Rusty-spotted Cat population is thought to decline by 20–25 % over the next three generations, primarily due to predicted habitat loss in central India (Mukherjee et al. 2016). The population is likely to be stable in protected areas; outside protected areas, it is threatened by diseases and road accidents (Mukherjee et al. 2016; Sharma & Dhakad 2020).

Our photographic record of the Rusty-spotted Cat in Walayar Reserve Forest is of interest as there are very few confirmed sightings of this species in Kerala. All the previous records in Kerala were obtained in dry deciduous forests (Shameer et al. 2019), and the present record also supports the Rusty-spotted Cat's preference for this habitat type. Further detailed surveys and ecological studies on this species are needed to ensure its long-term conservation.

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