

# RUSTY-SPOTTED CAT WORKING GROUP ANNUAL REPORT

2023





**Book:** RUSTY-SPOTTED CAT WORKING GROUP  
ANNUAL REPORT 2023

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## FOREWORD

Welcome to a celebration of the Rusty-spotted Cat Working Group's achievements in 2023! Imagine earth's diversity of life is like a complex compound, where some elements are so small that they often go unnoticed. The Rusty-spotted cat, a small marvel among felines, is comparable to one of these subtle elements.

This book captures the inspiring journey of the Rusty-spotted Cat Working Group, a team dedicated to protecting this beautiful species. They're spread across this cat's habitat, united by a shared vision—a world where this small, beautiful cat lives in its natural home. Each member is tirelessly working to make a real difference. These conservationists are on the frontline, fighting for the Rusty-spotted cat's survival by raising awareness to mitigate threats to this cat and organizing impactful campaigns. They have also recognized well the crucial link between conservation and sustainable livelihoods for both wildlife and communities.

Special thanks goes to Dr. Jim Sanderson (Founder and Director of Small Wild Cat Conservation Foundation) for guiding the group on this conservation journey. We are equally thankful for the generous donors whose regular support has been the backbone of the Rusty-spotted Cat Working Group's vital work. Their support has translated into actions on the ground, implementing conservation initiatives.

**GANGA RAM REGMI**  
Coordinator  
Rusty-spotted Cat Working Group

R S C W G

# 2023 FLASH BACK



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# Safeguarding tiny wild cats through education and awareness

One of our efforts to Rusty-spotted cat conservation has focused on education and awareness initiatives. This species urgently requires attention, for which our conservation journey reached to Suhelwa Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh, India. We also organized

Nearly 500 local residents and students residing in the vicinity of the Rusty-spotted cat habitat actively took part in the awareness campaign, gaining valuable knowledge about the species.

impactful events in the Banke district and Bardiya National Park, Nepal developing a joint approach to wild cat



protection.

The journey began within the walls of local schools, where we conducted outreach programs directly engaging with 250 students. Our aim was not only to impart knowledge about the Rusty-spotted cat but also to introduce a sense of responsibility and a deep understanding of the species' ecological



importance. With practical knowledge, these students are now prepared to actively contribute to the conservation of these elusive creatures within the sanctuary. Expanding our conservation efforts, we organized an awareness rally along the east-west highway in the Kohalpur municipality of the Banke district, Nepal. With over 60 participants including representatives from national parks, government offices, local communities and youth clubs, the rally became meaningful. A captivating street drama was played, narrating the Rusty-spotted cat's story and emphasizing the crucial need to reduce vehicle speed in habitats to mitigate roadkill incidents. Our efforts reached further into Bardiya National Park, Nepal where we engaged with 150 students for Rusty-spotted cat awareness and conveying the significance of its conservation. These students now serve as



well-

informed ambassadors, spreading the message within their academic circles.

The commitment of local peoples aligns with our vision of creating a world where the Rusty-spotted cat not only survives but also be safe in the care of a well-informed and compassionate community.



# Predator-proof chicken houses in **Rusty-spotted cat** territory

We started something special in the beautiful land area of Nepal and India where small and beautiful Rusty-spotted cats are found. Our goal isn't just to protect this elusive cat but also to bring harmony between nature and local communities. To keep both the Rusty-spotted cat and local farmers happy, we constructed 65 chicken houses right in the middle of where these cats hang out. The landscape of Nepal's western Terai and India's Utter Pradesh are a perfect place for our cool project because it's a home for diverse wildlife including Rusty-spotted cat.

Why chicken houses? Well, it's like a smart move to stop problems between farmers and wildlife, especially the Rusty-spotted cat. We made safe homes for chickens so they won't get eaten and everyone – people and wildlife – can live together happily. We didn't just build these chicken houses; we got local people involved. This isn't just about helping Rusty-spotted cats; it's also about making the community stronger. We taught them how to build and take care of these special houses, so it's like they own a part of it.

**65 chicken houses constructed for farmers in India and Nepal residing near the Rusty-spotted cat habitat of Terai Arc Landscape.**





# Building and revitalizing **tree houses:** enhancing local livelihoods

Our initiative to construct and renovate tree houses stands as a foundation in the conservation efforts for the Rusty-spotted cat inhabiting the Bindrapuri Community Forest of Bardiya. An abandoned tree house on the western bank of the Warai River within this forest habitat had fallen into disuse due to its deteriorating structure. To provide new life into this arboreal refuge, a series of renovations were undertaken. A protective roof, wooden plank walls, and comfortable sitting benches were added while doors were nicely mended. These efforts were not only aimed at restoring the structure but also at creating a vantage point for wildlife enthusiasts. The rejuvenated tree house now comfortably accommodates 3-5

people for overnight stays offering an immersive experience in the heart of nature. Beyond its role as a refuge, this tree house also supports as checkpoint against poaching, enhancing wildlife protection within the community forest. It is serving as a potential source of regular income through eco-tourism opportunities and contributing to the broader goal of promoting sustainable tourism in the area.

Additionally, Khata Bio-corridor in Bardiya serves as a vital habitat for wildlife where a tree house is situated. Previously damaged by wild elephants and remained nonfunctional, its recent renovation addressed structural changes with major pillars replaced and other necessary improvements. Situated within the Khata Bio-corridor, this tree house not only serves as a financial lifeline but also emerges as a critical conservation hub for the local communities.

Renovated tree houses in Bindrapuri Community Forest and Khata Bio-corridor are contributing to the livelihoods of locals and help protect small wild cats.



# Spreading the conservation messages through extension materials

In our campaign of Rusty-spotted cat conservation, we took a creative turn by developing and distributing extension materials and posters. We prepared 2000 eye-catching Rusty-spotted cat conservation awareness posters reaching the hands of students, local communities and forest users. These posters are more than just colorful prints carrying the message of conservation far and wide.

But our effort didn't stop there. To establish even stronger connection through message, we designed T-shirts and decorated the spirit of conservation. Now, our message is not just on paper; it's walking, talking and weaving

its way into the hearts and minds of the targeted audiences.

What's the impact? We anticipated that these materials have connected more than 2000 people, creating waves of awareness. Our conservation journey about engaging communities, inspiring the next generation and creating a collective voice for the Rusty-spotted cat.



Our message is not just on paper; it's walking, talking and weaving its way into the hearts and minds of the targeted audiences.

2000 conservation posters, 50 T-shirts and caps with conservation messages were printed.



ROOST-SPOTTED CAT



“ संरक्षण तथा जनचेतना”

को सबैभन्दा सानो  
**पोप्ले बिरालो**  
**ROOST-SPOTTED CAT**

Banke-Bardiya Complex  
 10 Baisakh 19-21

Supported By:



Organized By:

THIR POLY CON

Photo: Hermit Ahuja



# Billboards to prevent road kills of Rusty-spotted cat

5 billboards are installed around Banke National Park to help drivers slow down and prevent road accidents involving the Rusty-spotted cat. Over 1000 people are expected to see these signs. The local government and community played a key role in placing the billboards at appropriate locations.



# Plantation initiative for the Rusty-spotted cat

At the Thakurbaba community forest in Bardia, a nursery program took place with 34 enthusiastic participants. Together, they planted a total of 700 saplings, contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Rusty-spotted cat habitat. This collaborative effort highlights the community's dedication to protecting their nature.



# Rescue, Rehabilitate and Release center for empowering Rusty-spotted cat conservation

Ashan Thudugala, a dedicated conservationist from Sri Lanka, was engaged on the conservation of Rusty-spotted cat and other sympatric cat species through the rescue, rehabilitation and release (RRR). His partnership with local government authorities has facilitated him for the advancement of RRR in the country. He engages in building enclosures, providing essential medical care and offering comprehensive support to raise the rescued animals. From injured states to recovery, every step is carefully done under his watchful eye. The ultimate goal is to reintroduce these small wild cats back into their natural habitats.

In collaboration with his dedicated team, he conducts monitoring of small wild cats with a specific focus on the elusive Rusty-spotted cat and its sympatric counterparts. The use of camera traps becomes a vital tool in this endeavor, capturing glimpses of these elusive felines in their natural environment. By linking conservation with community engagement,

he is spreading the seeds of awareness and stewardship among the local population.



The RRR concept, as implemented by Ashan in Sri Lanka to safeguard small wild cats, presents a commendable approach that holds potential for successful application in other countries as well.

# Rusty-spotted cat conservation wheels in motion

One auto Rickshaw mobilized, 1000 posters distributed, more than 5000 local people informed about Rusty-spotted cat.

**Ramana**, an auto-rickshaw driver, lives in a small village near the Nallamala forest, India. Ramana applied a unique idea to use his auto-rickshaw to help save the Rusty-spotted cat. He wanted to spread awareness about this special cat and its need for conservation. He got creative – he decorated his auto-rickshaw with colorful posters featuring the Rusty-spotted cat and important messages about conservation. The areas he drove through were often ignored by big conservation efforts but Ramana took his message to these rural roads. Ramana is a regular service provider who connects people in remote areas to markets, healthcare facilities and schools. His auto-rickshaw became more than just a means of transport; it became a moving information board for conservation. Ramana's efforts were all about involving the community. He wanted everyone

to understand the importance of protecting the Rusty-spotted cat and its habitat.

Ramana made a real impact in the places where bigger campaign couldn't reach. Ramana's small but powerful idea was making a big difference in saving the Rusty-spotted cat and preserving its habitat for the future.

stand  
the  
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# Rusty-spotted cat through the lens

In the media worlds of India and Nepal, a feline celebrity – the elusive Rusty-spotted cat, has made headlines. The news spread across various platforms, from the scrolls of digital social media to the pages of newspapers, highlighting the discovery of this captivating cat at several places.

Photographers equipped with cameras and a passion for conservation headed on a mission to show the secrets of the Rusty-spotted cat. Their lenses captured the magic in several locations, the moments that showcased the elusive cat's grace and mystery. Some snapshots were taken by camera traps, revealing the cat's hidden movements while others are direct captures by

skilled photographers.

The same frames that hold the majesty of the Rusty-spotted cat also captured the threats it faces. The harsh reality – road kills as a threat to the survival of these gentle creatures. This photographic tale is more than a collection of images; it's a story of wonder, concern and a call to action. Road kills stand out as a reminder, urging us to collectively safeguard this enchanting species. The camera lens became a powerful tool not just for capturing moments but for spreading awareness and inspiring a commitment to protect the hidden gem of our natural world.





Social Media Photos



Photo: Rajasthan Forest Department

**Small Cats of India**  
 Vidhan Dwivedi · 2 d · 🌐

Rusty spotted cat.  
 Image taken in 2022  
 Rajasthan



**Saurabh Chitale**  
 23h · 🌐

Rusty spotted cat  
 Western Ghats, Monsoon 2022

Very happy to get a decent picture of this shy, elusive cat species. A night trail to be remembered for life as this was the first time I saw the rusty spotted cat. It is always a pleasure to spot a small cat in wild.

Found only in India, Sri Lanka and marginally in Nepal. Weiging between 0.9 to 1.6 kgs and measuring 35 to 48 cms in length.



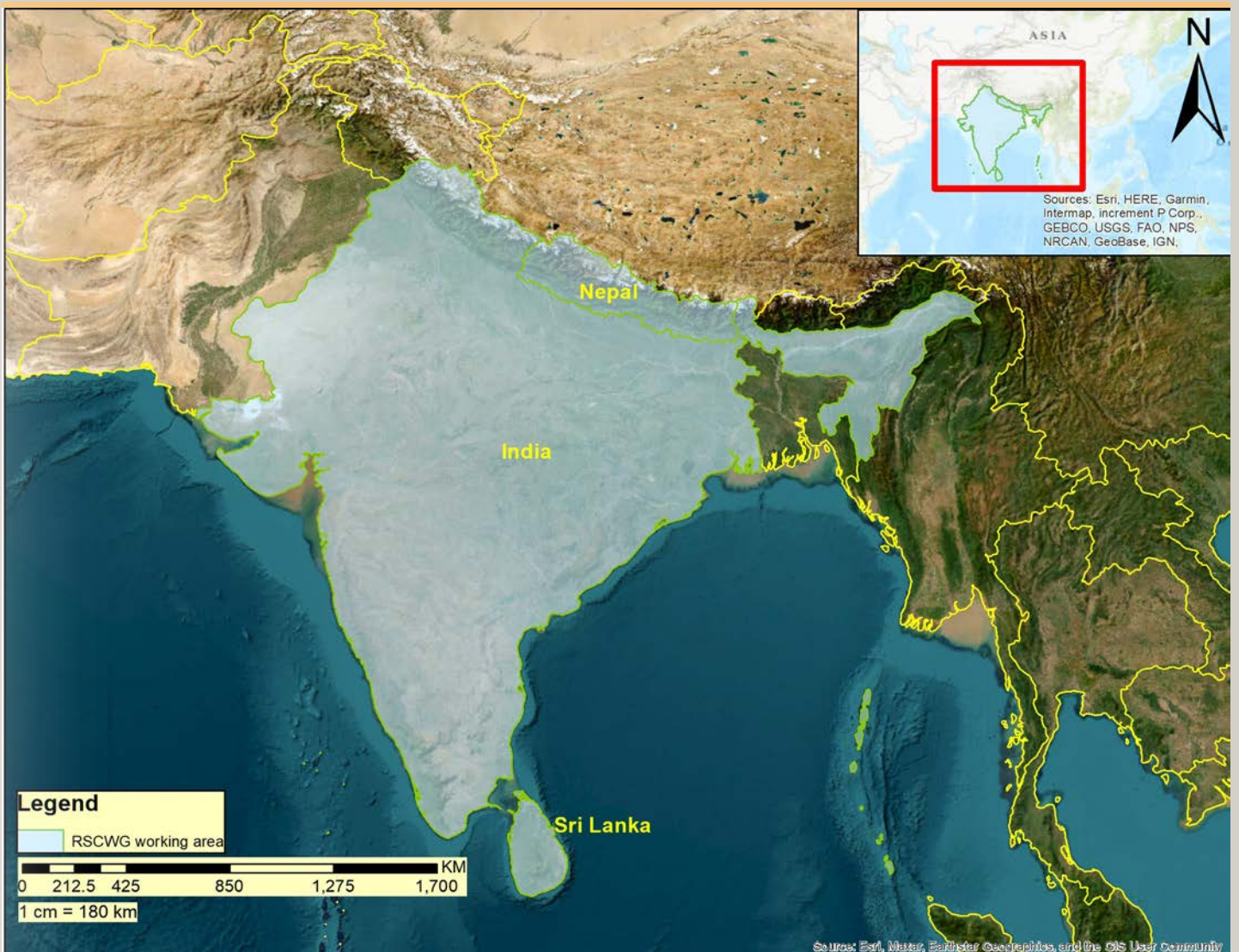
# Bridging conservation with the Chenchu Tribes in Nallamala forest, India

The Chenchu tribe resides in the Nallamala forests of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India. As a semi-nomadic and primitive tribal group, the Chenchus depend on the forest opting for hunting and do not cultivate land and gathering as their means of sustenance.

Within the territories of the Chenchu tribes in the Nallamala forest, the Rusty-spotted cat is found. We extend an invitation to these communities to become the stewards for this elusive feline. Collaborating with the Chenchu tribes in protecting the Rusty-spotted cat represents a sustainable approach to protecting our natural environment. Joining hands with them is a harmonious way to maintain the balance of nature. K Shiv Kumar is actively engaging with the Chenchu tribe to champion the conservation efforts of the Rusty-spotted cat within their habitat in India.



# Rusty-spotted Cat Working Group: Geographic Coverage



Donors



Partners





## RUSTY-SPOTTED CAT WORKING GROUP

The Rusty-spotted Cat Working Group (RSCWG) is a global network dedicated to the protection of the planet's smallest wild cat: the Rusty-spotted cat. Distributed in the regions of Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, this little cat is confronted with threats such as poisoning and road kills. RSCWG members are from the countries within the cat's geographical range involved in initiatives aimed at safeguarding and protecting this species.