

INDIAN SOCIETY FOR WILDLIFE RESEARCH

A

REPORT ON THE PILOT SURVEY ON THE
STATUS AND DISTRIBUTION OF FISHING CAT
(FELIS VIVERINA) IN THE HOWRAH DISTRICT
OF WEST BENGAL

BY -

TATHAGATA BHATTACHARYYA
SECRETARY

REGD. OFFICE:
122B, SOUTHERN AVENUE
(3RD FLOOR)
CALCUTTA-700 029.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I and my team mates Shri Dipak Mitra (I.S.W.R.)
Shri Heerak Nandy (Executive Member I.S.W.R.) and
Shri J.Ganguly (I.S.W.R.) on behalf of the society
wish to express our gratefulness to Shri G.S. Mondal
I.F.S., Chief Wildlife Warden, West Bengal, Shri
P.Sanyal, I.F.S., Asstt. Chief Conservator of Forest,
Shri V.Rishi, I.F.S., Director, Padma Naldu Himalayan
Biological Park, Shri Jonnajoy Gagan, and many others
whose guidance, co-operation and assistance has helped
us to conduct the survey successfully.

INTRODUCTION

This pilot survey on the status and distribution of
Fishing Cat on 25.6.88 was in continuation of our
previous survey trip to the area on 14.6.88, and
the report is prepared on the basis of the observations
made during our visit to the area.

LOCATION AND AREA

The village Melo is situated in the civil District of Howrah of West Bengal under the Panchla Police station of Jala-Biswanathpur Panchayat.

It so happened that on 3rd June 1988 around 8.30 - 9.00 hrs. In the morning the local people were collecting the 'Hogla grass' when they heard an unusual rustling sound inside the bush. Some of the enthusiasts crawled inside and they found two huge cat like animals locally known as 'Bagh' were playfully rubbing one another which in their view was a pre-mating courtship. This idea can neither be accepted or rejected since little is known about the breeding season or breeding habits of this animal (Fishing cat). Then at the sight of the advancing villagers the animals made a mock charge and the villagers fled. Later they surrounded the area and started beating the grass in search of the animals, who were beaten down and died on the following day while they were carried to the Panchla P.S.

An interaction with the villagers revealed that Fishing cat is a very common animal of the area who is distinguished by its usual habit of regular cattle lifting which might perhaps be an imaginative fabrication.

We found that the area seems to have 5-6 distinct patches of 'Hogla Grass' each comprising of 8-10 bighas of land. These 'Hogla' patches locally known as Hogla-Buri is usually a flat low land with a depression in the middle which usually under water of around 20-24 inches depth. The 'Hogla' blades usually reaches upto 8-10 ft. in height and grows in thick density in between.

The patches can be named as A, B, C, D, & E/F and A is the nearest village while E/F is the most distant one from the usual distance from one patch to another will be 250 meters(approx.) (Described in Diagram) (The cats were sighted and killed in (Patch A) pugmarks of the Fishing cat were recorded from two such patches A & C).

A resting and feeding place of the animal was found in patch A. It is a funnel like burrow, parallelly placed to the ground at an elevation of 4 inches from the ground with a uniform radius of about 8 inches. Pugmarks were seen at the entrance of the burrow and there were some remains of a village hen which was lifted last week. Since such burrowing or nesting habit of the animal is less known to me. So I would avoid to make any comment on this. (Described in Diagram 2).

Though it has been said that fishing cats have been sighted from almost all the patches but this does not necessarily mean that each of these patches is sustaining a population of this animal. It may, in fact, there is a practice of collecting of Hooghla grasses for roof thatching and other domestic purposes. These are collected rotationally from each of the patches and if may so happen that the animals may move rotationally from one patch to another subject to heavy demographic pressure on human intrusion. But to establish the same a detailed in depth study on the subject is necessary.

It is also definite that the animals must be having some alternative shelters as because the Hooghla patches gets submerged under water upto 3-4 ft from mid July onwards and remains so uptill end September during the monsoon. The possible alternative can be the local burial ground which restrict human intrusion in the area and may provide a good shelter for the animals.

As per local information goes the area sustains a population of Jackal (*Vulpes vulpes*), porcupine (*Hystrix indica*), small Indian Civet (*Viverricula indica*) and Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus hermaproditus*) Smooth Indian after (*Lutra lutra* Five striped squirrel (*Paraxerus lae pennatus*)). The bird life in the area is also quite rich and a checklist of birds sighted during the trip has been enclosed herewith.

We feel certain observations in the subject should be made which can be summarised as the following:-

An indepth Eco-Biological study of the animal should be conducted with proper emphasis on its ecology, ethology, physiology, population dynamics. Proper emphasis should be given to the foodhabits, preying methods food requirements, the availability of food and its utilisation strategy should also be studied. Emphasis should also be given on its breeding habits and seasons, breeding potential, population structure, birth rate and mortality rate.

Secondly, large scale awareness programme should be conducted in the adjoining villages which has already been initiated by us by distributing leaflets and posters popular talks and audio-visual shows should also be arranged in the area in order to educate and motivate the local people.

It is also suggested that some of the animals like fishing cat, Palm civet, and porcupine etc. can be trapped and kept in the Melo village for getting exhibited. Though this sounds somewhat unconventional but this will draw crowd from the nearby villages which will in turn aggregate and elevate the status and prestige of the Melo Village and the habitants will naturally take the initiative to save their valuable heritage.

Thirdly, we do not agree to the proposition of trapping and translocating the animals to any sanctuary or protected forest. Instead of that without diluting the status of conservation areas this particular area can be brought under the supervision of the Jala Panchayet who will be delighted with the responsibility of preserving the area with the aid of the state Forest dept. Provisions should be made to effect compensation to all damages caused by the resident wildlife of the area from the Govt. Moreover, if the Govt. approves and agrees to be the nodal point we wish to render our assistance both in cash or in kind in forms of compensation to meet such damages.

To conclude with we sincerely hope that the Govt. will consider our proposals in due time and take all necessary actions accordingly.

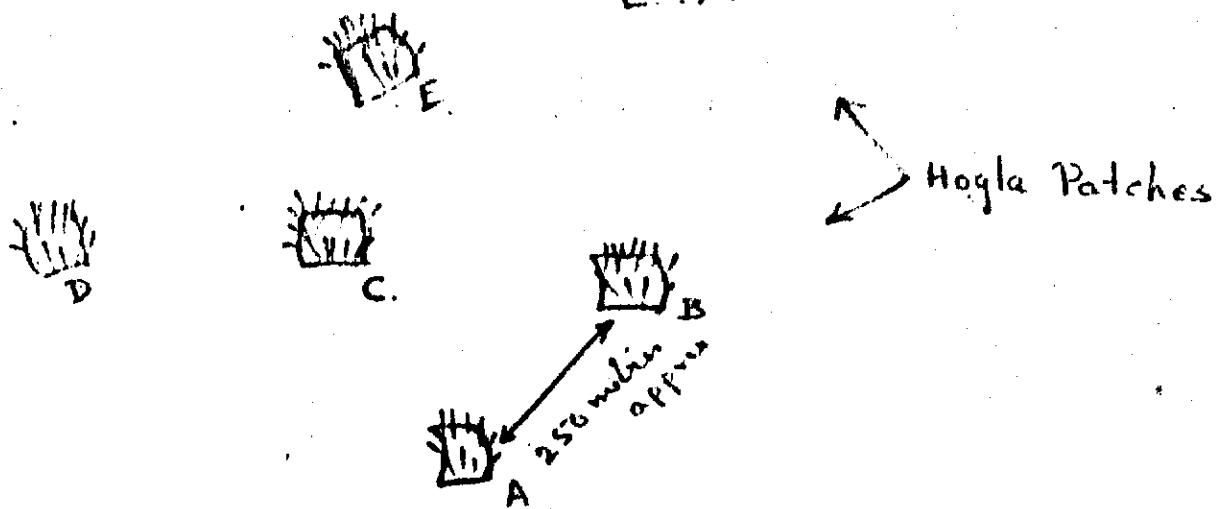
CHECKLIST OF MAMMALS AND BIRDS RECORDED
DURING OUR VISIT ON 25.6.88

MAMMAL

1. Five striped squirrel.

BIRDS

1. Stock Billed Kingfisher
2. White Breasted Kingfisher.
3. Pied Myna.
4. Common Myna.
5. Tailor Bird.
6. Baya or Weaver bird.
7. Paddy Bird.
8. Magpie Robin
9. Red Vented Bulbul
10. Red whiskered bulbul.
11. Gaur pheasant.
12. Koel.
13. Cattle Egret
14. Black headed Oriole.
15. Spotted Dove.
16. Tree Pie.
17. Grey Tit.
18. Golden Backed Woodpecker
19. Drongo
20. Crimson Breasted Barbet.



MELO VILLAGE.

Diagram A.

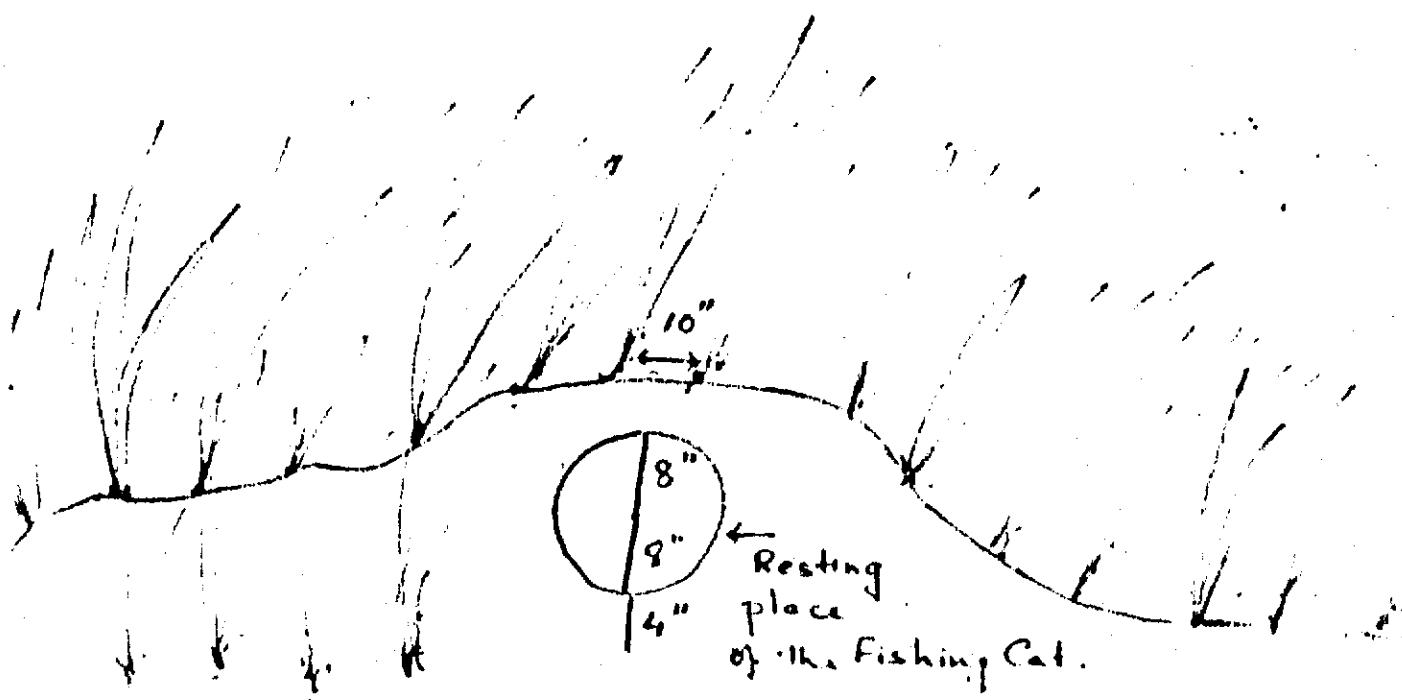


Diagram B



Fig. 1. PUGMARKS OF FISHING CAT

These Pugmarks were collected from Patch 'A'

Fig 1.