

THE JUNGLE IN SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW

By

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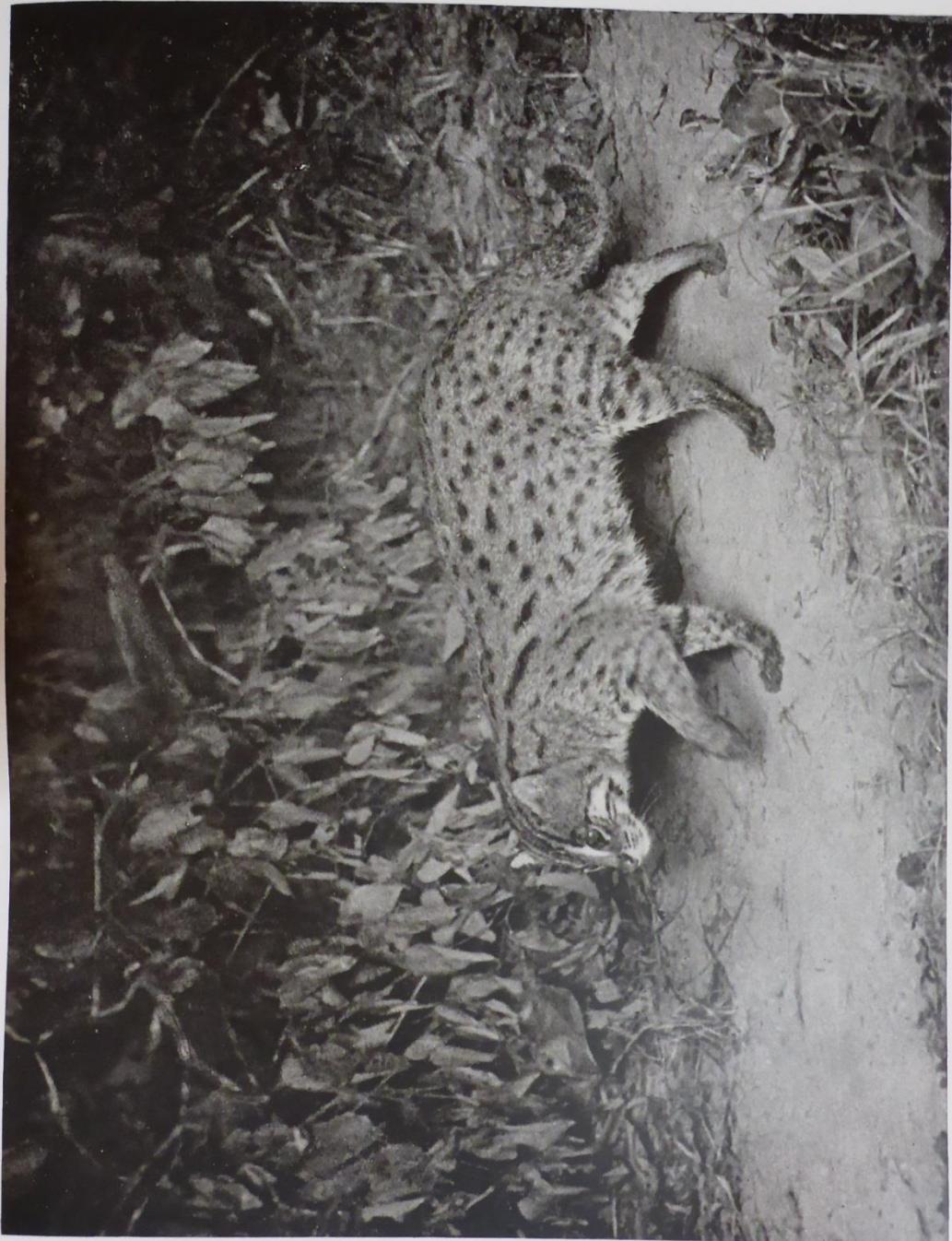
(*AUTHOR OF "WITH A CAMERA
IN TIGER-LAND"*)

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in which it was confined—just as we should probably do if, after a life of freedom, we were suddenly shut up in a cage little bigger than a coffin, and gazed at by all and sundry. I know of a case, however, of one of these cats, which became perfectly tame when kept in confinement by a forest officer in Southern India.

Another interesting cat is the fishing-cat, which, unlike most of its tribe, except the domestic cat which steals the kippers from the breakfast-table, is said to live chiefly on fish. The fishing-cat (*Felis viverrina*) is a little-known animal, concerning which Mr. W. G. Adam recently wrote a very interesting letter to the *Field*, describing observations he had made in Ceylon. The animal in question is far larger than the ordinary domestic cat, being midway in size between a cat and a leopard. The length of a good specimen is somewhere between three and four feet, including the tail, and weights up to twenty-five pounds have been recorded. The tail is short for the size of the body, or lengths would be considerably greater. The colour varies a good deal, as in most species of wild cats, but there are nearly always horizontal lines of elongated spots along the body. The photograph illustrating this chapter clearly shows these characteristic lines of elongated spots, and also the short thick tail, both of which features are typical of the species. This photograph—with a number of others—was recently taken in the forests of Oudh, within a short distance of a stream which provides the fishing required by this species.

I have myself never been so fortunate as to have had an opportunity of watching this cat emulating Izaak Walton, but Mr. Adam states that the manner of fishing is exactly that of a domestic cat when filching gold-fish from a bowl. Apparently the cat crouches on a rock in mid-stream or on a sand-bank, with fairly deep water near by, and then scoops out the fish with a single



'The fishing-cat—an Izaak Walton of the jungle

paw as opportunity offers. It seems that, despite his angling habits, he resembles nearly all other cats except the tiger, and never swims or even wades in the water. Certain it is that this cat is by no means entirely dependent upon the fish he catches. If he were, he would assuredly often go hungry, for no angler (human or otherwise) who fishes entirely from the bank and does not care for getting even his feet wet can hope to subsist entirely upon his catch, which must fail altogether when wind or water are unfavourable. Undoubtedly fish form only a part of the diet of the fishing-cat, which he varies with molluscs, snakes, frogs, small mammals, birds, and indeed any edible living creature that he is able to overcome; but as he is nearly always found near water, either tidal, swamp, or stream, it would appear that fish comes first in favour in his menu.

Being powerfully built and extremely ferocious, the fishing-cat is no mean customer to tackle, and cases have been known where a single cat has routed a whole pack of dogs, leaving many badly scratched and some even seriously wounded. When injured, he is said to fight lying on his back and tries to rip open the intestines of his assailants with his hind claws. Sometimes he preys on fairly large animals, and in Bengal and Malabar—moist countries where he grows to his biggest stature—he has been known to seize calves, pariah dogs and sheep. Cases are even said to have occurred when he has carried off human infants from village huts in Malabar, but there is some doubt as to the authenticity of these stories. There is a definite record from Blyth, however, to the effect that a newly-caught male, caged by the side of a young leopardess, broke through the partition and killed the leopardess. An animal that can "take on" a leopard would probably be quite capable of snatching away a fragile human

baby should the opportunity offer; but baby-snatching is certainly not a habit of this cat, which prefers to hunt in peace on the sides of secluded jungle streams or marshes.

The spoor left by fishing-cats is very typical and should at once give a certain indication of the presence of the animal, even though it may be a considerable time before the maker of the track is himself seen. It is far larger than that of any other of the smaller jungle cats, and indeed looks enormous in comparison with the delicate foot-marks of the diminutive and small-footed leopard-cat. The spoor is smaller than that of a leopard, and although it might possibly be mistaken for that of a young leopard, it is more compact and less splayed out, the general effect being alike and yet not alike a diminutive leopard's track. I never met the fishing-cat until I was recently transferred to the jungles of Oudh, and very soon after my arrival there I came across these tracks, which at first glance suggested young leopards, and yet were not quite like any leopard's tracks I had ever seen before. Also it seemed strange that so many young leopards should be going about without their mothers. I soon suspected the presence of fishing-cats, since the tracks were generally near water, and it was not long before I discovered that this animal is quite a common inhabitant of these fine forests in the north of Oudh.

It has been recorded that the South American jaguar is another cat that spends a good deal of its time in catching—or trying to catch—fish, but it is not quite clear as to what method of angling he adopts.