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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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SAGAR DAHAL¹ AND ASHAN THUDUGULA²

Second International Symposium on Fishing Cat Conservation

After three years of the First International Fishing Cat Symposium conducted in Nepal on 2015, Fishing Cat conservationists from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Indonesia and Malaysia gathered at the 55th annual meeting of Association of Tropical Biology and Conservation ATBC at the Kuching of Sarawak Malaysia for the "Second International Symposium on Fishing Cat Conservation" from 1st July to 5th July 2018. The theme of the symposium was "Persistence of a Tropical Wetland Specialist, Ecology, Activism and Conservation".

Altogether, eight people presented their ongoing conservation and research activities on fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus* in their respective home countries. The participants of the symposium were also the members of Small Wild Cat Conservation Foundation and working towards the conservation of wild small felid conservation issues in their own home countries. They were Anya Ratnayaka and Ashan Thudugula from Sri Lanka, Erwin Willianto from Indonesia and Jaysillan Mohamed Azlan from Malaysia, Giridhar Malla and Tiasa Adhya from India, Sagar Dahal from Nepal and Vanessa Herranz Munoz from Cambodia (Fig. 1). James G. Sanderson from Global Wildlife Conservation chaired the session. Among the presenter three people Ashan, Anya and Sagar were Global Wildlife Conservation Associates and Tiasa was a Wildlife Conservation Network scholar.

Anya Ratnayaka presented her work on how she is using fishing cat to conserve the wetlands of Colombo. The uniqueness of Anya's work comes from her depiction of the fishing cat as a symbol of wetlands and thus flood-controllers. She is using this to enhance the fishing cat's status and protecting its wetland habitat that is currently threatened with urbanisation and its ill-effects. Similarly, Ashan Thudugula presented his more than four years of fishing cat monitoring work in the hill country of Kandy. He is also taking track of all the road kills of fishing cat and collecting DNA samples for genetic analysis.

Giridhar Malla, a student from Wildlife Institute of India, presented his ongoing PhD project where he is using camera traps and vocal analysis of fishing cat to track individual animals and understanding their population. In addition to that he also presented how

fishing cats are helping to protect mangrove forests in Godawari delta of India. Tiasa Adhya from India, working close-to-a-decade in the felid, could not be there with us physically but sent her presentation with supplementary voice records. She shared her experience on engaging multiple-stakeholders in her conservation work in West Bengal and on conducting research in Orissa. She is sensitising the local community through awareness programmes, incentive based conservation and films for the conservation of fishing cat.

Vanessa Herranz Munoz presented her work on the fishing cat research and conservation activities in coastal mangrove areas from South West Cambodia. She is working with the local authorities and people to raise the awareness on these elusive cats.

Sagar Dahal presented his four years of work on fishing cat conservation activities in Nepal. He presented how stewardship/incentives based conservation can be motivation to local community to monitor their cats and take ownership of biodiversity around them. He also presented that the legal challenges and gaps in the existing policies for the conservation of fishing cat in the human dominated landscape of Terai of Nepal.

Erwin Willianto presented his two years of work on Java, Indonesia, and showed small cats photographs from his study site. All the participants of the symposium concluded that the cats recorded from Java were leopard cats *Prionailurus bengalensis*. Subtle difference in

size of the body, tail length and head structure made it clear that Java no longer holds fishing cat. Erwin also concluded that the fishing cats are extirpated from three sites of its historical range: Teluk Jakarta, Pulau Dua National Park and Sancang Wildlife Reserve.

Dr. Mohd-Azlan Jayasilan, Associate Professor of University Malaysia Sarawak, Kuching gave an enriching presentation on the wild small cats of Malaysia. He discussed their distribution range with elevational gradient and sympatry between fishing cat, leopard cat, Bornean bay cat *Catopuma badia*, flat headed cat *Prionailurus planiceps*, and Sunda clouded leopard *Neofelis diardi*.

The five days long symposium also gave an opportunity for many side talks on how fishing cat conservation could move forward along its distribution range countries. The venue for the conference Kuching which is translated in English as Cat City was the perfect place to reunite and talk about the future of fishing cat conservation. We missed Sakib Ahmed and Sayam Choudhary from Bangladesh and Murthy Kanti Mahanti from India who are also working on fishing cat conservation in their respective countries.

About 900 participants from 65 countries working on tropical biodiversity conservation were present at the ATBC conference. The next annual meeting of ATBC is going to be held at Madagascar, Africa and the Asia chapter symposium to be hosted in Sri Lanka in 2019.

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Fig. 1. Participants of the Second International Fishing Cat Symposium at ATBC Conference. From left to right: Ashan Thudugala, Giridhar Malla, Anya Ratnayaka, Vanessa Herranz Munoz, Erwin Willianto, Jim Sanderson and Sagar Dahal.