

Trapped fishing cat mistaken for leopard in Greater Noida

The cat is listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.



In the second such incident in the last two months, the Gautam Buddh Nagar Forest department received word of a leopard being trapped in a village well on Saturday — only to discover that it was a fishing cat.

The UP Forest department said the endangered cat was straying into human habitation as wetlands shrink in the face of rapid urbanisation.

Panic spread after word spread that a leopard was trapped in Bankapur village of Jewar area. But Forest department officials, on reaching the village, discovered a fishing cat — a medium-sized wild cat — trapped inside the well.

“The fishing cat is one of the largest wild cats found in India and is about twice the size of a domestic cat. Its fur has dark spots and is often mistaken for a leopard,” K K Singh, divisional forest officer, Gautam Buddh Nagar, said.

This is the second such incident reported in Greater Noida in the past two months. In March, panic spread after reports that people were being attacked by a “leopard” in Kasna. But Singh said the animal was once again a “small wild, possibly another fishing cat that had attacked domestic animals”.

Listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, the cat faces a high threat of extinction in the wild due to loss of habitat, drainage of wetlands for agriculture, pollution and unsustainable fishing practices.

The Forest department said the two incidents of fishing cats, usually shy animals, straying into human habitation was a worrying trend.

“Fishing cat populations are typically concentrated around wetlands. But in Greater Noida, water bodies have been sacrificed to make way for flats and roads. As a result, the animal is left without food and habitat and is coming into conflict with human beings,” Singh said.

The Forest department said three incidents of leopards wandering into Meerut district had fuelled people’s fear of wild cats. “When the fishing cat was found, it was badly injured. It seems the cat was hurt when it fell inside the well, but it is also possible that villagers — finding the animal trapped — tried to kill it,” an official said.

The fishing cat has been shifted to Lucknow Zoo, where it is being treated and is said to be stable.