

ISSN 1027-2992

CAT NEWS

N° 44

Spring 2006



IUCN
The World Conservation Union



SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION
Cat Specialist Group



Fig. 2. Detector dog at work (Photo: Pack-leader Detector Dogs)

more susceptible to making errors that are difficult to control. Dogs may become frustrated when scats of the target species are not present, and may instead locate non-target scats in order to get their reward. The level of frustration, and hence errors, will likely increase

when dogs become tired, hungry, or hot. It is important that the dog handler be constantly aware of the mental and physical state of the dog, as well as its general personality and limitations.

Detector dogs are the most expensive method of the four tested here. However, since I did not know what percentage of scats collected would be confirmed as bobcat prior to the final analysis, I collected more scats than turned out to be necessary to confirm the presence of bobcats on most transects. If this information had been available right from the start, the transects could have been surveyed in much less time, and in the time thus saved, additional transects could have been surveyed. Purchasing a detector dog instead of hiring one can also reduce costs.

The detector dog required more field time than the other three methods. Field time for hair, camera, and scent stations was similar. However, whereas detector dogs visit a transect only once, cameras, hair snares, and scent stations require multiple visits to survey sites,

and travel time between office and survey sites may be significant. Temperature limitations may decrease the time a dog can work each day. The average minimum and maximum temperatures during the detector dog surveys for this study were approximately 11°C and 23°C. Although we began at dawn, the dog began to overheat within a few hours due to high insolation. Dogs may still be used in warm climates and seasons, but they must be habituated and used carefully.

Acknowledgements

I thank Mr. T. Turner and Mr. T. Waddell for permission to conduct this study on the Armendaris Ranch, and for their support during the study.

References

- Sargeant G. A., Johnson D. H. and Berg W. E. 2003. Sampling designs for carnivore scent-station surveys. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 67, 289-288.

¹ Department of Biology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1091, USA rharison@unm.edu

Fishing Cat on India's East Coast

Shekhar Kolipaka¹

The mangrove forests spreading over the 240 km² of Coringa sanctuary on the coast of Andhra Pradesh state are one of the only surviving fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus* habitats of any considerable size on the east coast of India.

Fishing cats, twice the size of large domestic cats, exist in these habitats and nearly five other species were recorded in a four-day survey of mammal species richness by studying the habitats for signs and tracks and for indicators that determine the health of the habitat..

The Coringa mangroves seemed to be a perfect habitat for the long-term survival of the fishing cat, which is classed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List. Signs of the cat were recorded on many occasions and the mangroves seem to be in good health and provide the needed cover and prey for the cat's survival.

The photo of fishing cat footprints (16°50.35' N/82°14.95' E) shows foreclaws, which protrude from the sheaths even when retracted (Fig. 1). The toes are partially webbed.

Direct human impact on the mangroves is restricted because of the vastness of the region and the active involvement of locals in the fishing industry. The mangroves have been declared a protected area and major exploitation is prohibited. However, indirect threats, such as the pollution of waters from upstream industries and a resulting decline in the fish catch, as well as silting up of the mangroves, may have long term impact on the ecosystem.

There is minor conflict when the fishing cats, locally called *bavura pil-li*, take fish from the fishermen's nets – two are known to have been killed and eaten. However, the fishing cat has no other predators in the sanctuary. The short survey revealed much information



Fig. 1. Fishing cat footprints on India's east coast (Photo: S. Kolipaka).

on the species in the sanctuary and the health of the habitat. This information is useful to formulate a short term study of the ecology of the fishing cat in Coringa. Information on the abundance of the fishing cats and the consumed prey species will be vital to ensuring the survival of this endangered species in the sanctuary.

¹ <shekhar_k_s@yahoo.com>