

# CAT

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# news





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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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## Fishing cat may not be extirpated in Pakistan: a call to survey coastal mangroves

**Since the last assessment of the fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus* by the IUCN Red List in 2010, it has been assumed that this species may have been extirpated from Pakistan. However, recently published articles, surveys, and an incident of a captive fishing cat in southern Pakistan indicate that some populations might still occur in the country. Immediate field surveys for the species are warranted, especially, based on occurrence elsewhere in its range, in mangroves southeast of Karachi. Should fishing cats be found there, global species records and national protection efforts will need enhancement.**

For about half a decade since the last assessment of the fishing cat by the IUCN Red List it has been announced that the species may have been extirpated from Pakistan (Mukherjee et al. 2010, Jutzeler et al. 2010). The last published records of wild fishing cats in Pakistan were in the 1960s and 1970s from the rivers of the Indus river valley, lakes and swamps (Roberts 1977), and then again in 2012 from Chotiari Reservoir in Sindh (Islam et al. 2015). A few years prior to these records, an 'escaped' fishing cat was reported from a residential area of coastal Karachi (Mirza & Omar 2008). However, the reliability of this record, and other such reports in the news, is questionable since no photographs were provided. Around the same time, feces and tracks encountered during field-based surveys in 2007/2008 were identified as being from fishing cat (<http://www.fishing-cat.wild-cat.org/>; notes on Pakistan). The

take of fishing cats by hunters and demand for their capture is supported by their presence in the illegal wildlife trade market (F. Zubairi, pers. obs.).

In February 2015, Faraz Zubairi (FZ), engaged in the rescue and rehabilitation of animals in Karachi, Pakistan, received information of an anonymous person possessing a certain 'wild cat', who claimed it was a fishing cat, and requiring medical attention. He obtained photographs and verified that the cat was indeed a fishing cat (Fig. 1a). He speculated that the cat was obtained locally and possibly from within Pakistan, but given the sensitivity of the situation was unable to obtain further information on where the person obtained this fishing cat from. He later identified the cat to be a female, and found that it apparently had not left its 30x30x60 cm cage for, possibly, over two months. It was unable to move

the lower half of its body, indicating severe muscular atrophy, presumably due to the insufficient space for it to move around in the cage. Its paws were infected since it had been constantly clawing and striking the cage when it felt threatened. In March 2015, the fishing cat was rehabilitated at the facility of a local trust with the use of a custom-built enclosure, including a water pond and a shelf (Fig. 1b).

Fishing cat is a protected species in Pakistan, where it is listed as endangered (<http://eol.org/pages/1037335/details>) and hunting is prohibited. Considering the approximate locations of these recent occurrences, and fishing cat records in remaining mangrove areas in other countries (e.g. Kolipaka 2006, UNI 2007, EGREE 2013, McKerrow 2015, Naidu et al. 2015), fishing cats might well be persisting in Pakistan's coastal mangroves. This information beckons field-based sign and wildlife camera surveys to determine fishing cat occurrence in the remaining mangrove areas in Pakistan. These surveys can be initiated in the following locations with 5-20 km<sup>2</sup> of surrounding mangroves:

- the Thatta area (Approximate location 24°41' N / 67°16' E),
- Marho Kotri Wildlife Sanctuary (24°29' N / 67°20' E),
- an unnamed mangrove area south of Kharo Chan (23°54' N / 67°36' E), and
- remaining mangrove cover in the Keti Bunder South Wildlife Sanctuary (24°02' N / 68°02' E).

Data from such surveys will inform conservation interventions necessary for protecting the fishing cat in Pakistan.



**Fig. 1.** a) fishing cat in a 30x30x60 cm cage, in which it had been held for months. b) The same fishing cat after rescue and rehabilitation in private facility (Photos F. Zubairi).

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