

2. OCCURRENCE OF THE RUSTYSPOTTED CAT (*FELIS RUBIGINOSA*) IN ORISSA

(With one text-figure)

Two (one male and one female) rustyspotted kittens (*Felis rubiginosa*) were collected from the road leading to Bhramarbadi village in Daringbadi block (Balliguda Forest Division) in Phulbani dist. on 16th February, 1995 evening, by the Sub-Collector and Sub-Divisional Police Officer of Balliguda Sub-division and received at the Nandankanan Zoological Park, Orissa, on 18th February, 1995 through the good offices of the Divisional Forest Officer, Balliguda.

These were mistakenly identified as leopard cat kittens, with their eyes open and an estimated age of about 3-4 weeks. The kittens were initially kept in a well ventilated wooden box and then shifted to an enclosure with dimensions 1.85 x 1.65 x 2.0 m³. They were fed with minced goat meat for a few weeks followed by goat meat. Unfortunately the male died on 29th March, 1995. By August 1995, the female kitten had matured and revealed the characteristic size and colour pattern described for the rustyspotted cat by Prater (1971) (Fig. 1). However, she also died on 15th October, 1995. The systematic list of mammals from Orissa reported by Das *et al.* (1993) does not include the rustyspotted cat. This is the first record of the occurrence of this rare species of lesser cat in Orissa.

Reviewing the literature on the occurrence of the rustyspotted cat, Chakraborty (1978) states that this interesting cat is recorded only from certain localities in southern India, Sri Lanka and Seoni in Madhya Pradesh. He further states that one female specimen of the rustyspotted cat was collected from Udhampur (Jammu and Kashmir) on 16th October, 1975 during the faunistic survey.

It occurs in southern India and along the western ghats upto the Dangs in south Gujarat (Prater, 1971; Saharia, 1981; Gee, 1964). Sightings of this lesser cat in Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park, and Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary in Gujarat have been reported in recent years (Pathak,

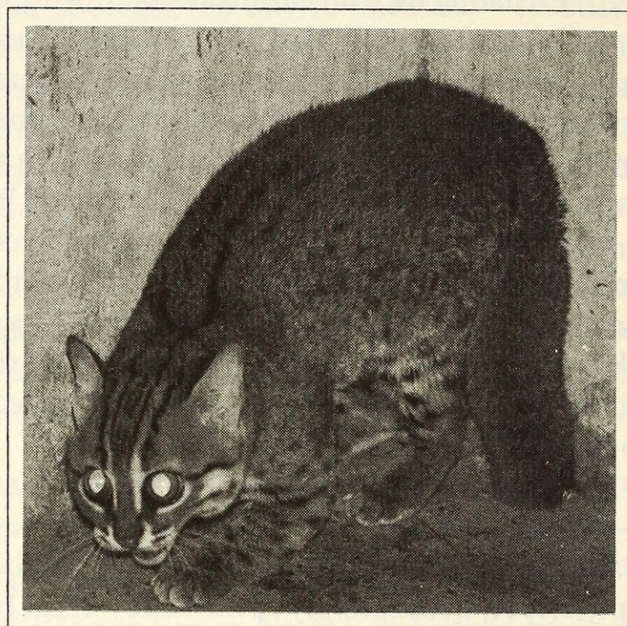


Fig. 1. Female rustyspotted cat in Nandankanan Zoological Park

1990; Chavan *et al.* 1991). Tehsin (1994) reported the sightings of this rare cat for the first time near Udaipur (Rajasthan) in July, 1992. This species has also been reported in Panna dist., Madhya Pradesh (Digveerendrasinh, 1995).

The present observation and the observations of other workers on the occurrence of the rustyspotted cat suggest that the species has a much wider range of distribution in India than was believed earlier.

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3. LEOPARD (*PANTHERA PARDUS*) ATTEMPTING TO PREY ON INDIAN GIANT SQUIRREL (*RATUFA INDICA CENTRALIS*)

It was the morning of 5th June, 1995 at Satpura National Park (MP) when my driver suddenly halted our van on seeing a huge bamboo rhizome off the road. As we descended from the vehicle to examine the rhizome we heard the alarm call of a giant squirrel (*Ratufa indica centralis*) from a distance of about 20 m. Following the direction of the very loud call, we spotted the squirrel on the trunk of a huge *Adina cordifolia* tree, lying motionless and calling continuously. After a second appeared a leopard (*Panthera pardus*) from the other side of the tree. The leopard was balancing himself very gingerly on the tree trunk right behind the squirrel. The squirrel swiftly went to the other side of the tree with the leopard following it. This chase continued two more times around the tree. Finally, the squirrel took a bold leap forward and jumped on to an adjacent *Terminalia tomentosa* tree and then to the next tree and disappeared. The leopard did not pursue it further as he

jumped and vanished into the thick undergrowth below. Various predators seem to be a perpetual threat to giant squirrels. Raptorial attacks on giant squirrels have been reported earlier. Borges (1986) and Joshua and Johnsingh (1994) have reported black eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis perniger*) attempting to predate on the giant squirrel. Datta (1993) and I have also observed a crested hawk eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus cirrhatus*) trying to attack a giant squirrel. Hutton (1949) had observed the Nilgiri marten *Charronia gwatkinsi* (Horsfield) feeding on giant squirrel. Leopards are known to be opportunistic feeders and occasionally feed upon arboreal prey such as langurs, but the giant squirrel does not seem to be such an easy prey.

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