

## First photographic record of Rusty-spotted Cat with kitten from Delhi NCR, India

The Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* (Hindi: Rohit-Dweep Billi) is recognized as the world's smallest wild cat, distributed across India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (Prater 1998; Kittle & Watson 2004; Appel 2016; Lamichhane et al. 2016). In India, its range extends from Tamil Nadu in the south to Jammu & Kashmir in the north, covering parts of central, western, and eastern regions including Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Odisha (Chakraborty 1978; Patel 2006). Although primarily associated with moist and dry deciduous forests, scrublands, and grasslands, this species is also known to occur near agricultural fields and even human settlements (Kittle & Watson 2004). Rusty-spotted Cats prefer dense vegetation and rocky areas (Patel 2006).

Ecologically elusive and naturally low in density, the Rusty-spotted Cat has often been under-recorded in several landscapes (Mukherjee et al. 2016). Its conservation status reflects its vulnerability, being listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and categorized as 'Near Threatened' on the IUCN Red List (Mukherjee et al. 2016). The species faces significant threats from habitat loss, agricultural expansion, and industrial development, with nearly 75% of its range under imminent risk (Mukherjee et al. 2016).

Recent observations and photographic evidence from different parts of India suggest that populations of this cryptic felid persist outside

protected areas. A confirmed record from Kalesar National Park, Haryana highlighted its presence in sal-khair forests of the Shivalik foothills (Ghaskadbi et al. 2016), while the first state-level record from Takhni-Rehmapur Wildlife Sanctuary, Punjab, further filled gaps in its distribution along the outer Himalaya (Kanwar & Lomis 2020).

In this context, we record our observations on *P. rubiginosus* from Delhi NCR, which is a highly urbanized region. It draws attention towards ecological and conservation significance of the Rusty-spotted Cat as a component of surviving urban biodiversity.

### Study area

Kot Village is situated in Faridabad district, Haryana, India (28.3° N, 77.3° E), within the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). The site lies in the northern Aravalli Hill range, which represents one of the oldest fold mountain systems in India. The Kot village landscape forms a scrub–agriculture–settlement mosaic, which, despite heavy anthropogenic pressures such as urbanisation, grazing, quarrying, and encroachment, continues to harbour small mammals, reptiles, and birds.

The vegetation is primarily tropical dry deciduous and thorn scrub, consisting of *Vachellia nilotica*, *Vachellia leucophloea*, *Prosopis juliflora*, *Ziziphus nummularia*, *Azadirachta indica* and seasonal grasses.



The Rusty Cat was observed on a False Ashoka tree



Rusty-spotted cat with kitten in Kot Village, Faridabad



Nocturnal sightings including use of a False Ashoka tree. © Yatin Verma & Tejveer Mavi.

## Methodology

Field observations were conducted regularly from August 2022 onwards as part of ongoing monitoring of mammalian diversity in the region. Surveys were conducted in the early morning (0530–0800 h) and evening (1700–2000 h) when small carnivores are typically most active. Upon encountering the animal, direct sightings and photographic documentation were made using DSLR camera.

## Results and Observation

On 16 September 2023, a Rusty Cat was captured from its perch on a False Ashoka Monoon longifolium tree, which is a common ornamental species planted in gardens and along human settlements, showing how common ornamental plants can provide small microhabitats for animals. A Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* was photographed on 22 July 2025 in Kot Village, Faridabad District,

Haryana (Delhi NCR) during a field survey. This study presents the first confirmed record of the Rusty-spotted Cat.

The observation includes an adult individual with a kitten, providing the first photographic evidence of breeding activity of the species in both Delhi NCR and Haryana. The kitten appeared to be dependent on the adult, confirming active reproduction. Previously, only 4–5 opportunistic sightings had been reported from different parts of Delhi NCR, none of which established breeding.

This record, therefore, marks a significant extension of the species' documented breeding range and highlights the conservation importance of fragmented green spaces within the highly urbanized NCR landscape.

There is a need to formulate management plans that encompass both protected and non-protected landscapes, as viable populations of Rusty-spotted Cats may be persisting beyond reserve boundaries.

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