

## Final Evaluation Report

We ask all grant recipients to complete a project evaluation that helps us to gauge the success of your project. This must be sent in **MS Word and not PDF format**. We understand that projects often do not follow the predicted course but knowledge of your experiences is valuable to us and others who may be undertaking similar work – remember that negative experiences are just as valuable as positive ones if they help others to learn from them.

**Please DO NOT fill in and submit this form until the project has been completed.**

Complete the form in English. Note that the information may be edited before posting on our website.

Please email this report to [jane@rufford.org](mailto:jane@rufford.org).

Your Details	
<b>Full Name</b>	Giridhar Malla
<b>Project Title</b>	Strengthening conservation efforts towards fishing cat protection in the nonprotected mangroves, Andhra Pradesh
<b>Application ID</b>	38982-1
<b>Date of this Report</b>	10-02-2025

**1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.**

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
<p>Initiate camera trapping exercises in different non-protected mangrove areas in Andhra Pradesh to monitor and study the ecology of fishing cats outside protected areas.</p>			<p>Yes</p>	<p>This project successfully achieved its objective by identifying suitable non-protected mangrove areas with confirmed fishing cat presence and gathering extensive data on their presence, activity patterns, behaviour, and habitat use. This work critically provided the first insights into fishing cat population status and distribution in these non-protected areas, including mangroves and aquaculture ponds.</p> <p>Our team deployed 8 camera traps across 20 ha of mangrove and private aquaculture landscapes, with a total sampling effort of 224 trap nights (average 28 days per camera per occasion). This effort resulted in confirmed fishing cat detections across multiple sites, providing the first systematic evidence of their presence in these non-protected habitats. Repeated detections enabled preliminary insights into activity patterns and habitat use within mangrove and aquaculture interfaces. We identified seven individual cats, and our population assessment revealed a concerningly rapid decline due to conflicts with aquaculture pond owners, hunting, and habitat loss.</p>

				<p>Prior to camera trapping, our team conducted threat assessments using land-use land cover (LULC) mapping derived from satellite imagery, complemented by ground surveys. These analyses identified significant habitat modification due to aquaculture expansion. In parallel, interviews with local communities, including fishers and members of the Yanadi tribe, revealed ongoing conflict with fishing cats, including retaliatory killing and instances of hunting for bushmeat. These findings provide strong contextual evidence for the threats contributing to the observed population pressures. Our camera trapping exercise further identified seven individual fishing cats, and when combined with the documented intensity of threats, suggests a concerning decline in the local population.</p>
<p>Conduct regular monitoring surveys to track population trends, assess threats, and identify priority areas for conservation interventions.</p>			Yes	<p>We successfully achieved this objective. Building upon our extensive data on fishing cat population status, trends, and threats, this project enabled us to identify key priority areas for their conservation. The Yetiporu mangrove area, situated between the Krishna and Godavari estuaries, has now been recognised by the local communities as a dedicated fishing cat conservation area.</p> <p>This recognition is further underscored by the community's initiative to erect and unveil a fishing cat statue in their village.</p>
<p>Conduct awareness</p>			Yes	<p>We have successfully completed this objective by organising fishing cat</p>

<p>campaigns in local communities, schools, and colleges, emphasizing the importance of mangroves, fishing cats, and sustainable practices.</p>			<p>awareness campaigns in 12 local schools, five colleges, and 25 mangrove-dependent villages in the study area.</p> <p>We reached approximately 140 school children, 70 college students, and 260–300 community members across the study area. As part of these outreach campaigns, we also distributed educational posters highlighting fishing cats and other mangrove-dependent biodiversity.</p>
<p>Organize workshops and training sessions for forest department staff and local communities on fishing cat conservation and mangrove habitat restoration. Identify degraded habitats and implement mangrove restoration to enhance and expand fishing cat habitats.</p>		<p>Yes</p>	<p>We successfully achieved this objective by conducting several workshops for local communities, with the participation of local authorities. We conducted four workshops with tribal and fisher communities, focusing on mangrove restoration and the declaration of fishing cat conservation areas. Each workshop was attended by approximately 35–40 participants.</p> <p>As a result, the communities have come forward to conserve 20 hectares of mangrove areas. Additionally, we completed the restoration of another 10 hectares with <i>Rhizophora</i> mangrove species. We primarily adopted a natural creek-based restoration strategy, collecting wild seedlings from nearby mangrove patches and planting them along creek edges where survival rates are higher. These sites were selected as buffer zones between degraded and intact mangroves. In addition, certain areas were left for natural regeneration with community support.</p>

				Notably, these conserved and restored areas have shown promising signs of fishing cat presence, with frequent sightings and camera trap evidence confirming their usage.
Develop a collaborative fishing cat action plan.			Yes	<p>We have conducted and organised meetings with the community and developed a collaborative draft fishing cat action plan. The report is being prepared and will be available in the local language and English in a few weeks.</p> <p>The Action plan is prepared in the local language Telugu and the region is mostly Krishna district, in Andhra Pradesh where the project site is located. This is more beneficial for the tribal, fishers' communities, fisheries and forest department.</p>

**2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.**

a) Identification of key fishing cat conservation areas:

The project pinpointed crucial non-protected mangrove areas where fishing cats reside, providing a foundation for targeted conservation efforts. Specifically, the Yetiporu mangrove area was recognized by the community as a dedicated fishing cat conservation area.

b) First comprehensive data on fishing cat population status and distribution in non-protected areas:

The project generated the first detailed information on fishing cat presence, activity, behaviour, and habitat use in these vulnerable, non-protected zones, including mangroves and aquaculture ponds. This baseline data is essential for understanding and managing the population.

c) Discovery of a rapidly declining fishing cat population and identification of key threats:

The project revealed a concerning trend of rapid population decline, directly linked to conflicts with aquaculture pond owners, hunting, and habitat loss. This

alarming finding highlights the urgent need for intervention and targeted conservation strategies to address these specific threats.

**3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties during the project and how these were tackled.**

Initially, community engagement was challenging. However, through persistent dialogue and by securing their prior consent, we successfully gained their support for the project. Unfortunately, due to the unprotected nature of the study area, we experienced some losses and damage to our camera traps.

**4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.**

Local communities were crucial to the project's success. Consistent communication and securing their prior consent cultivated their initial involvement, leading to active participation.

The community's most significant benefit is recognising the Yetiporu mangrove area as a dedicated fishing cat conservation area, demonstrating a sense of ownership and responsibility. This recognition is further emphasised by their initiative to erect a fishing cat statue in their village, showcasing their commitment to conservation. Additionally, the project conducted awareness campaigns in 25 mangrove-dependent villages, increasing awareness about fishing cats and their ecological importance.

**5. Are there any plans to continue this work?**

We are committed to continuing this vital work. The project's success, coupled with the identified threats to fishing cat populations, underscores the urgent need for sustained efforts. Our future plans include ongoing monitoring of fishing cats within these non-protected areas and active community engagement to ensure the long-term survival of this vulnerable species. Building on the success of the Yetiporu model, we aim to replicate this approach in other villages, creating a network of community-driven conservation areas to protect critical fishing cat habitats.

**6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?**

- a) We want to publish our data on the population status, trends, and threats of fishing cats in peer-reviewed journals like *Oryx* and *Cat News* to contribute to scientific knowledge and inform conservation practices.

- b) Creating reports for stakeholders, including local communities, local government agencies, and conservation organizations.
- c) Some team members want to present findings at conferences this year.
- d) Sharing results with local communities through meetings, presentations, and educational materials.

## **7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?**

Based on the project's findings, our next steps would be to address the identified threats of conflicts with aquaculture pond owners, hunting, and habitat loss is paramount. This could involve implementing conflict resolution strategies, promoting sustainable aquaculture practices, strengthening anti-poaching efforts, and enforcing habitat protection measures.

Secondly, we would like to monitor the fishing cat population long-term, which is essential to tracking its status, assessing the effectiveness of conservation interventions, and adapting management strategies as needed.

Thirdly, continued engagement with local communities is essential for this project to foster a sense of ownership and ensure the long-term success of conservation efforts.

## **8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?**

Yes, the Rufford logo was prominently featured on all project banners and posters, and even the community-installed fishing cat statue includes the logo. We also plan to invite news and media outlets to showcase the Yetiporu conservation initiatives. This media outreach will help reach a wider audience and provide valuable publicity for the Rufford Foundation.

## **9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.**

Giridhar Malla is the team leader and holds a PhD in Environmental Science, boasting a decade of experience working with various small cat species in India, including the fishing cat, marbled cat, rusty spotted cat, and Asiatic golden cat. He is also a member of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group. His profound knowledge of the landscape and extensive expertise in coastal areas of Andhra Pradesh will be instrumental in bolstering our proposed conservation initiatives. He will be leading activities like identifying landscape level fishing cat monitoring, camera trapping,

developing GIS maps, liaison with the local forest department officials and higher authorities to safely implement the project.

Ram Sai Kannekanti, a member of the local community residing in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh, contributes valuable insights about the landscape. With a background in Mass Communication and a deep-seated passion for wildlife protection and community support, Ram Sai has spent several years working with the Yanadi tribes and supporting their livelihoods. His role will be pivotal in organizing village-level meetings involving multiple stakeholders and fostering collaboration. In addition, he has a strong affinity for fishing and bird watching.

Sujit Bhupathiraju, holding a Master's degree in Business, possesses a profound love for wildlife conservation. His extensive knowledge of current wildlife trends in the state of Andhra Pradesh is a valuable asset to our project. Sujit will play a crucial role in engaging with community leaders and aquaculture owners within the landscape. His prior experience in organizing discussions with various stakeholders and persuading them to support wildlife conservation in Andhra Pradesh positions him as a key advocate for our cause. As the project has to run in several private owned aquaculture areas, his knowledge in dealing with situations will be extremely helpful.

In addition to our core team, we are fortunate to have several other team members who will contribute at various stages of our project. Nitya Bankupalli who will help us in school programs and nature education initiatives. Ramarao Damarla, a local community member from southern Krishna with extensive knowledge of the mangroves and their biodiversity, will provide valuable insights. Moreover, we have enlisted the assistance of several local village youth who will support us throughout the project.

#### **10. Any other comments?**



**Picture 1: Community meeting about the global importance of fishing cats**



**Picture 2: Mangrove restoration along with the community in Yetiporu**



Picture 3: Fishing cat hoarding and statue installation program at Yetiporu fishing cat conservation area



Picture 4: Male fishing cat captured several times was seen using aquapond in these non-protected areas

**ANNEX – Financial Report**  
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