

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Asmita Pageni
Project Title	Status Survey and Conservation of Fishing Cat (<i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>) in Parasi district, Nepal
Application ID	44076-01
Date of this Report	30 Sep, 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
Document the presence and status of fishing cats in Parasi district				Based on information obtained from the reconnaissance survey and consultations with the Sub-division Forest Office, camera trapping was conducted in March to assess the occurrence of fishing cats. A total of 11 camera traps were deployed across eight stations (five stations with single paired cameras and three stations with double paired cameras), for 15 days resulting in a total effort of 150 trap nights in Pratappur and Susta Rural Municipalities. Camera placement was guided by habitat indicators such as wetlands, fish ponds and adjacent agricultural fields within a human-dominated landscape. Although fishing cats were not detected during this survey period, camera traps recorded several other wildlife species, including jungle cat, small Indian civet, large Indian civet, and golden jackal.
Assess threats and local perceptions				Questionnaire surveys conducted with 100 respondents (we initially aimed to survey 200 respondents; however, following preliminary field visits and pilot surveys, the study area was refined to focus on two rural municipalities (Pratappur and Susta) where fishing cat habitat suitability and stakeholder relevance were highest) in Pratappur and Susta R.M. Information on human-wildlife conflict and local knowledge

				collected.
Promote conservation awareness and stewardship				Outreach in 20 schools (850 students) and ~100 community members. Road signs (n=3) and information boards (n=2) installed. Four local participants trained through Fishing Cat February 2025. Local capacity built for future works.

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

a) Enhanced awareness and engagement of local communities and schools

We conducted conservation awareness programs in 20 schools across Pratappur, Sarawal, and Susta Rural Municipalities, reaching a total of 850 students, primarily from grades 6–10. Interactive sessions, quizzes, and small rewards encouraged active participation and curiosity. In addition, approximately 100 community members were engaged through dedicated outreach sessions on wild cats. These outreach activities were largely mobile and opportunistic conducted during field visits, informal gatherings, and whenever community members were found in groups, rather than through formally scheduled meetings. The sessions involved face-to-face discussions, distribution of outreach materials, and information sharing on wild cat identification, ecology, and coexistence practice. Outreach materials were expanded to include posters on wild cats of Nepal, along with species-specific posters on jungle cat, leopard cat, fishing cat, and Bengal tiger produced by Wild Care Nepal. This approach was adopted to emphasize that understanding fishing cat requires broader awareness of wild cat species found in Nepal. Furthermore, the project area lies close to Chitwan National Park, and there have been previous records of tiger sightings, making it important to address wider human-wild cat interactions in our project area.

Road signs (n=2), information boards (n=1), posters (n=1000), and other outreach materials further reinforced the conservation message. Stickers (n=500) were received in-kind from Terai Fishing Cat Project for the distribution. For signs placement, priority was given to road sections with higher human and vehicle movement, areas where signs were clearly visible to motorists, and locations with a history of wildlife road mortality, including a site where a fishing cat had previously been killed in a road accident. In addition, an information board on the fishing cat was installed along a major road section in Pratappur Rural Municipality. Although this activity was not originally included in the project proposal, it was deemed necessary as most local residents were unfamiliar with the species. The support of the Sub-Division Forest Office, Pratappur was important in this activity who committed to taking ownership and ensuring the long-term upkeep of the board after project completion. To further strengthen the outreach effort, Wild Care Nepal installed an additional hoarding

board at a different location about the conservation importance of small wild cats in general. These activities helped increase knowledge about fishing cats and fostered a positive attitude toward their conservation among the participants.

b) Baseline documentation of wildlife and foundation for fishing cat monitoring

Camera trap surveys were carried out at strategically selected sites, recording a diverse range of wildlife species and generating 150 trap nights of data. While fishing cats were not detected during the camera trapping, the survey provided baseline information on local biodiversity and habitat use. Questionnaire surveys were also conducted with local residents to assess their knowledge of fishing cats and other wildlife, as well as their willingness to engage in conservation efforts. Preliminary findings suggest that fishing cats may occur at very low densities in the project area. Although we didn't record any fishing cat during this study, it would be premature to infer local extirpation, as fishing cats are an elusive species and often require extended survey effort and repeated sampling to be detected through camera trapping. Local residents reported occasional sightings of animals believed to be fishing cats; however, these observations cannot be independently verified, as the species may be confused with similar looking species such as the small Indian civet. Nevertheless, such reported locations provide useful leads and will be treated as priority target sites for future camera trap surveys. In nearby areas of Chitwan National Park, particularly along the eastern side adjoining Parasi district, there has been increasing sighting of fishing cat, suggesting a thriving population in the area. In this context, there remains strong potential to document the presence of fishing cats within Parasi district, although this will require long-term and continuous camera trapping efforts. Accordingly, Wild Care Nepal will continue camera trapping across multiple seasons to account for seasonal variation in activity and to improve detection probability.



Figure 1: Fishing cat photographed during broad daylight hours in Chitwan National Park (CNP), Nepal. Sightings of fishing cat has increased during the recent time in CNP. © Hari Adhikari/Terai Fishing Cat Project

c) Capacity building and empowerment of local participants

The project trained four local participants through the Wild Cats Series 2025 program. Among them, two were undergraduate-level students, while the remaining two were local community members affiliated with buffer zone user committees. The local participants were purposefully selected based on their prior involvement in wildlife-related activities. The two students were selected through a competitive process and attended the training alongside 12 other participants representing different districts and institutions across Nepal.

In addition, two local individuals (one male and one female), both alumni of earlier Wild Cat Series were engaged as field assistants during the questionnaire survey and camera trap studies. Through these roles, they gained hands-on experience in wildlife research and social surveys. By building local skills and knowledge, the project strengthened community capacity to actively contribute to conservation efforts, ensuring that project impacts extend beyond its formal duration.

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

During the camera-trapping phase, two cameras placed in parallel at one of the sites went missing. We suspected they might have been taken by local children out of curiosity. With the support of community members, a message was circulated requesting the safe return of the cameras and that no actions would be taken against them. The following day, both cameras were found intact at the exact site from where they had been removed.

Another challenge was posed by adverse weather conditions. Heavy rainfall and landslides forced us to postpone the outreach program on several occasions. On one occasion, I had to return midway due to a landslide blocking the road. Despite these setbacks, the program was successfully conducted in August once conditions improved.

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

Local communities were engaged throughout the project in different ways. Four participants from the area (two students and two citizen scientists) attended a three-day residential training on wild cat research and conservation outreach. The program, known as the *Wild Cats Series* and annually hosted by Wild Care Nepal, was intentionally organized within the project site so that the local community would directly benefit. A total of 19 participants from other districts also joined, which not only created learning opportunities but also contributed to the local economy and introduced outsiders to the region's biodiversity and conservation challenges.

We also collaborated with local institutions such as the Divisional Forest Office and the Buffer Zone User Committee during the project period. Mr. Ram Piyari Koiri, a forest guard and project team member, supported the camera-trap study by identifying potential locations. The camera trap was assisted by Mr. Ashish Pokharel, a forestry undergraduate and local community member, whose experience in this project has helped him develop his own proposal to study wild cats for his bachelor's dissertation.

Conservation materials, such as hoarding boards and road signs, were placed under the stewardship of Mr. Khem Raj Neupane (a local hotelier) at Triveni and the Sub-

divisional Forest Office (Pratappur). The materials and logistics for these items were sourced from a local vendor. Featuring wildlife images, these materials sparked curiosity and interest among community members. The same vendor also provided accommodation for our team during the entire camera-trapping phase. In this way, we were able to build trust, support the local economy, and strengthen our study of the region's biodiversity. School and community outreach programs further raised awareness of biodiversity among residents.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, there are plans to continue this work. One of the objectives of the project was to document the status of fishing cats in the region. During the project phase, we conducted only a single-season survey, which may not have captured the full range of fishing cat activity. To address potential seasonal biases, Wild Care Nepal plans to carry out additional surveys in the dry season.

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

A range of wildlife was documented through camera-trap surveys conducted during the project phase in the study area. These checklists will be shared with the Divisional Forest Office, helping build a systematic record of wildlife in the region. Camera-trapping sessions will still continue after the project to gather more comprehensive information on fishing cats. As more information collects, we aim to prepare a scientific manuscript reporting on the status of fishing cats, which will also include findings on local perceptions of their conservation in this region.

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

Fishing cats are elusive species, and documenting their population and conservation status requires dedicated, long-term effort. In Nepal, many fishing cat populations occur outside protected areas, where they face higher survival threats. To fully understand their status in the region, it is important to expand survey efforts to additional potential locations and conduct multi-season camera trap study. It is equally necessary to assess existing threats and implement conservation actions to ensure the survival of fishing cats in human-dominated landscapes.

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, we acknowledged the support of The Rufford Foundation in all programs and knowledge products developed under this project. The Rufford logo was included on all training materials, hoarding boards, and outreach resources, and the Foundation's support was highlighted during community programs and school presentations.

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

Below is a list of full team members involved in the project.

- i. Ms. Asmita Pageni – Served as Principal Investigator, responsible for planning, coordination and execution of all project activities.
- ii. Mr. Ashish Pokharel – Served as Project assistant during the camera trap survey, responsible for field works, including camera trap, data recording & questionnaire surveys
- iii. Ms. Sushmita Chaudhary – Served as Project Assistant, supported field works, rapport building in local communities through local dialect, and assisted in questionnaire surveys
- iv. Mr. Ram Piyari Koiri – Local Resource person, forest guard, supported field works through site visits, camera trapping and ensuring safety of the placed equipments
- v. Dr. Rama Mishra – Served as Project Advisor, involved in social survey questionnaire design, review of outreach materials and supported project activities. (Dr. Rama Mishra provided substantial technical and logistical support throughout the project. She played a key role in co-organizing the Wild Cats Series, contributed to the design of the camera trap study, and led the finalization of the social survey questionnaire. Dr. Mishra also reviewed outreach materials to ensure technical accuracy and relevance. In addition, she was actively present during field activities, providing on-site guidance and support during project implementation)

10. Any other comments?

I am deeply grateful to The Rufford Foundation for their invaluable support, without which this project would not have been possible. I also extend my sincere thanks to my team at Wild Care Nepal, who went above and beyond in every aspect of the work. I'm glad we could connect with local students and community members through this initiative, some of whom are now ready to carry forward this conservation effort. For us, this project has opened the path for continued work on fishing cats in this region. We remain committed to generating further knowledge about fishing cats that will guide their conservation.

Annex

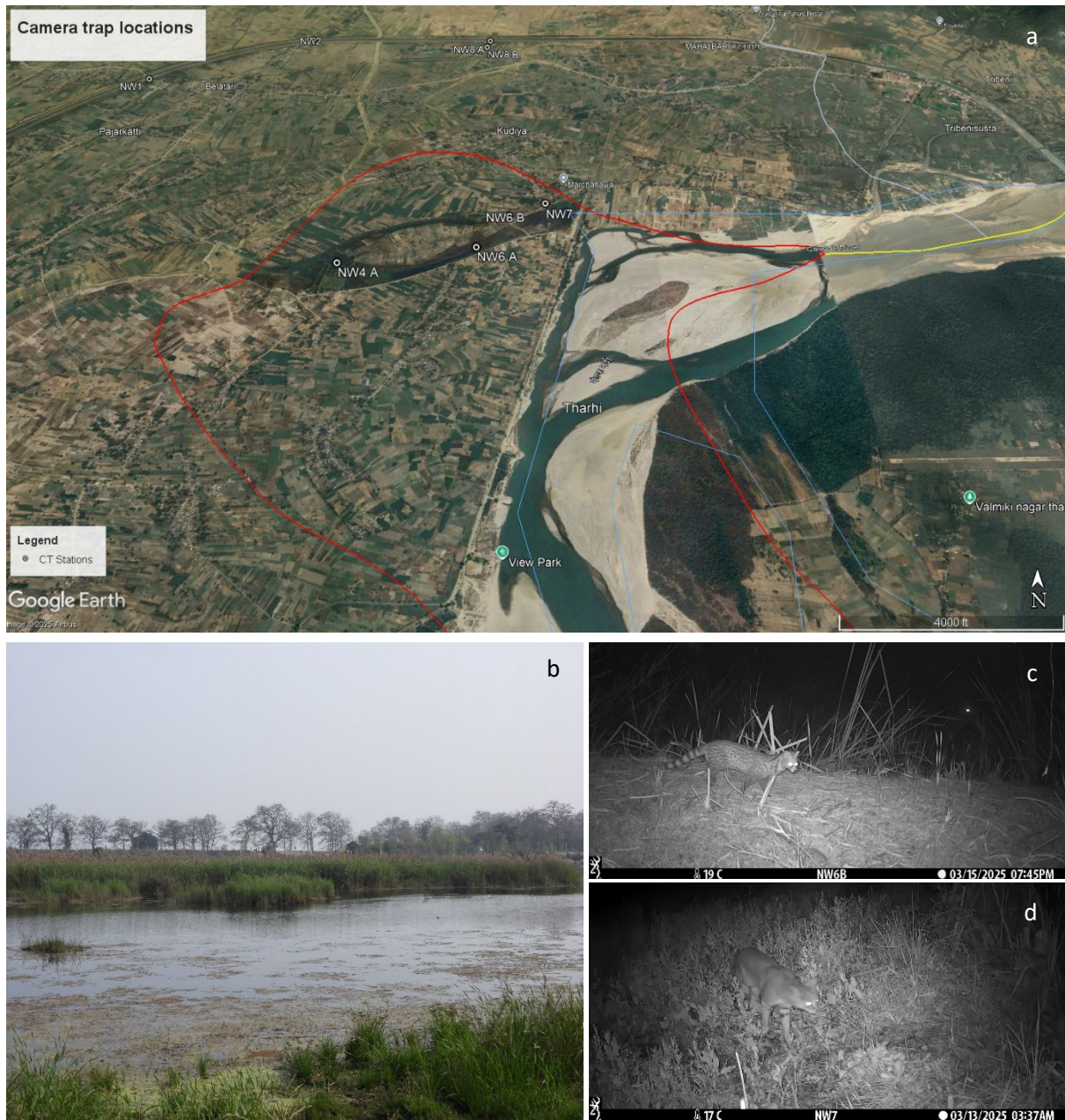


Figure 2: Camera trap activities at project site a) Google map locations of camera trap stations b) Potential habitat of fishing cat in Susta rural municipality c) & d) Small Indian Civet and Jungle Cat images from camera trap, respectively

ANNEX – Financial Report

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