

Project Update: October 2010

Recent studies (2004-on going) in eastern Gujarat of western India indicated a population of rusty spotted cat in Panchmahals region. Despite the region's richness in biodiversity, it is least protected. The regions' habitats are threatened due to over urbanisation. The impact of such land use dynamics on this cat is unknown, since very little is known of its ecology.

Rusty spotted cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* is an endemic cat species of the Indian Sub-continent and found in two subspecies in India and Sri Lanka. Despite its wide distribution range in India, until today it is only rarely sighted and reported from its distribution range. It is imperative to identify areas within the species' range that have optimum, relatively large and secure populations for future conservation. Even being listed in the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amendment (2006), under highly protected Schedule (I) just as larger cats like Tiger, Asiatic Lion or Leopard are protected; no programme has been undertaken specifically for the rusty-spotted cat's conservation.

This cat has received little specific research attention, except through the Rufford Small Grant Foundation Programme 2009-10. Before this, the cat was first photographed in October 2004. In the 2007 study, the encounter rate of this cat was derived as 0.07 cats/km driven. Results also indicated that the species was wide spread resident and also did not seem to be a habitat specialist. Besides these we could know nothing due to elusiveness and nocturnal habits and also unlike larger cats, these smallest cats do not travel on set trails as well as don't leave their faeces exposed, precluding applications of camera trapping, scat collections and spoor tracking, the best known non-invasive methods. Radio telemetry has been selected as most suitable tool for study as well as available grant programme from Rufford Small Grant Foundation.