

# CAT

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# news





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Original contributions and short notes about wild cats are welcome

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# Rusty-spotted cat preying on bats

**A rusty-spotted cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* was sighted and photographed carrying a bat in its mouth in Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat, India. Bats have never been reported as a prey of rusty-spotted cat. Our observation calls for a profound study on food preferences of rusty-spotted cat.**

Rusty-spotted cat is amongst the smallest species of wild cat that has a wide distribution in India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, but its behaviour and food preferences are rarely reported primarily due to its secretive nocturnal life. Presence of rusty-spotted cat has been reported from several locations in Gujarat (Digveerendrasinhji 1963, 1987; Anonymous 1990, Pathak 1990, Chavan et al. 1991, Patel & Jackson 2005, Patel 2006, 2010; Vyas et al. 2007). Naturalists, wildlife photographers and research groups continue to provide inputs about sightings of rusty-spotted cat in new areas and varied habitats and hence, it is speculated that this enigmatic species has a

much broader distribution than the published reports (Mukherjee & Koparde 2014).

The observations and photographs showcased herein were noted during one of the bat habitat surveys in Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary JWLS (22°20'-20°33' N /73°35'-73°45' E) located in the Panchmahals and Vadodara districts of Gujarat (130.38 km<sup>2</sup>; altitude 230-354 m) consisting of dry deciduous forest interspersed with tribal villages and agro-pastoral landscapes (Pandya & Oza 1998, Devkar et al. 2013). The undulating hilly landscape has abandoned manganese mines that houses colonies of microchiropteran bats (Devkar et al. 2011, 2013).

Although there was indirect evidence (scat and pugmarks) of the presence of rusty-spotted cat in some of the mines, direct sighting or photographic evidence was not available. Our team was successful in photographing rusty-spotted cat in one of the manganese mines during a study of evening emergence of Greater mouse tailed bats *Rhinopoma microphyllum* on 2 October 2013 (Fig. 1). A fawn-grey coat with a rufous tinge and small rusty-brown spots were clearly evident on its body. Also, the solid stripes on head and two dark streaks on each cheek were also seen that helped us in its identification as a rusty-spotted cat (Menon 2014). The cat was seen making efforts of catching flying bats without much success. Soon, the cat got disturbed due to our presence and disappeared. During subsequent field visits, rusty-spotted cat was occasionally sighted in nearby areas. While returning from one of the survey on 23 November 2015, a rusty-spotted cat was seen carrying a prey in its mouth. The cat soon disappeared in fading light but allowed us to take a photograph. A careful scrutiny of the photograph revealed presence of a bat



**Fig. 1.** Rusty-spotted cat sighted in a manganese mine trying to catch bats 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2013. Insert: Close-up picture of the same rusty-spotted cat taken at 11<sup>th</sup> January 2013 at the same location (Photo K. Upadhyay).



**Fig. 2.** Rusty-spotted cat with a bat in its mouth (Photo R. Bhatt).

in its mouth (Fig. 2). The species of bat could not be established but a cursory glance suggested that it was possibly a fruit bat. During our surveys we had observed several colonies of *Pteropus giganteus* and traditional roosts of *Cyanopterus sphinx* and *Rousettus leschenaultii* in Shivrajpur and Jambughoda ranges of JWLS (unpublished observations). Other research groups have documented that rodents constitute an important food source for rusty-spotted cat and other species of wild cats, followed by reptiles, birds and other vertebrates (Athreya 2010, Mukherjee et al. 2004). But no chiropteran has ever been reported as its diet and hence, observations showcased herein are the first evidence of rusty-spotted cat predated on bats. Initially,

we had speculated that a shift of food preference of rusty-spotted cat to chiropterans could be the result of a decline in conventional prey base during winter. However recently on 10 July 2016, a rusty-spotted cat was seen predated on microchiropteran bats emerging from their roost at Dungarvat, Gujarat, near Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary, suggesting that bats are consumed throughout the year. Our observation calls for a profound study on food preferences of rusty-spotted cat.

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