

BREEDING SEASON OF RUSTY-SPOTTED CAT *PRIONAILURUS RUBIGINOSUS* (GEOFFROY) IN SAJJANGARH WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, UDAIPUR DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

Satish Kumar Sharma

Foundation for Ecological Security, 18, New Ahinsapuri, Fatehpura, Udaipur, Rajasthan 313001, India
Email: sksharma56@gmail.com

The Rusty-spotted Cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus* (I. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1831) is the smallest of all cats. This cat occurs in scattered pockets in India and has been recorded from peninsular India, Western Ghats up to Rajasthan and Jammu & Kashmir (Prater, 1980; Tehsin, 1994; Gurung & Singh, 1996; Bhatnagar *et al.* 2000; Singh, 2001; Menon, 2003; Kumar & Singh, 2005; Manakadan & Sivakumar, 2005). All published papers on Rusty-spotted Cat are mainly occurrence reports, and no information is available on breeding season of the species.

On October 21, 2006, at about 2000hr I spotted an infant kitten on the tar road, inside the Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary, in the headlight beam of my motorcycle, while coming down from the wireless station of Forest Department, situated in Sajjangarh palace, atop Bansdhara hill. The sanctuary road is hilly and meandering. Tall grasses and bushes present along the roadside make it impossible to see movements of animals clearly. Probably, the mother cat was carrying the kitten to some safer place, but due to the sudden approach of the motorcycle through a blind curve, she must have had dropped the kitten near the grass cover. The kitten was small and motionless and I could not identify it immediately. I waited for a while but the mother cat did not return.

I carefully observed the kitten in the torch light; its eyes were open. When lifted, it started wailing very weakly. It was looking healthy but exhibited slow movements. Two longitudinal black-edged white stripes were present on its forehead, its eyes were ringed with white. The fur of the baby was relatively long and soft. Its lower lip and chin were white. Its under parts were whitish with black spots. Its tail neither had rings nor spots, though extreme tip was faintly black. The fur of the neck and shoulder zone had light rusty-gray tinge while its back was grayish. The kitten's body was devoid of spots. Its nail and whiskers were whitish in colour. Its small ears were roundish, nearly hidden in the fur and were not projecting above its head. Various measurements were taken for record: weight 100g, tail length 6cm, head and body length 16cm, sex male.

Cats give birth to blind babies. Eyes of the kittens of Jungle Cat *Felis chaus* open 11 to 15 days after birth (Prater, 1980). In the present observation, the kitten must have probably been just about 15-20 days, if Rusty-spotted Cat kittens take as many days to open their eyes.

After making quick observations, I released the kitten at the same spot where it was found and waited some distance away in the dark for some time. After fifteen minutes,

rechecked, the kitten had disappeared; probably the mother had lifted it.

Most of the earlier published papers on Rusty-spotted Cat have contributed to our knowledge of the species' distribution and habitat. The present observation is important, since it gives information about breeding season of this species in Sajjangarh Wildlife Sanctuary and adjoining forest of southern Rajasthan. It seems, that the Rusty-spotted Cat breeds in winters in southern Rajasthan.

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