



## Rusty-spotted cat (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*)



**Synonyms:** *Felis rubiginosa*

**French:** Chat Rougeâtre, Chat Rubigineux, Chat-léopard De L'Inde

**Spanish:** Gato Rojizo, Gato Rubiginosa

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Chordata

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Carnivora

**Family:** Felidae

**Genus:** *Prionailurus* (1)

**Size:** Head-body length: 35 – 48 cm (2)  
Tail length: 15 - 29 cm (3)

**Weight:** 0.8 – 1.6 kg (2)

### STATUS

The rusty-spotted cat is classified as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List (1). The Indian population is listed on Appendix I of CITES and the Sri Lankan population is listed on Appendix II (4).

### DESCRIPTION

One of the smallest cat species in the world, the rusty-spotted cat (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*) has been called the hummingbird of the cat family, due to its small size, agility and activeness (2). About half the size of a domestic cat (2), the rusty-spotted cat has a short, soft, fawn-grey coat with a rufous tinge, covered with lines of small rusty-brown spots that form solid stripes along the back of the head (5), flanks and back (3). The underparts are white, marked with large spots and bars (2). The face has two dark streaks on each cheek, and four dark stripes that extend from the eyes, back between the ears to the shoulders (2). Its ears are small and rounded, and the tail is faintly marked with dark rings (5).

### RANGE

Occurring in India and Sri Lanka, most records of the rusty-spotted cat are from southern India, but there are increasing reports from central and northern India (3) (5) and more recently in southwestern Nepal (6).

### HABITAT

The rusty-spotted cat inhabits dry deciduous forest, scrub, grassland and rocky areas (2). It has also occasionally been found in modified habitats such as tea plantations, sugarcane fields, paddy fields and coconut plantations (3) (5) including those close to human settlements (7).

## BIOLOGY

The agile rusty-spotted cat is apparently mainly **nocturnal** (2), and spends its days in a hollow log, tree or forest thicket (4). Whilst this cat is a capable climber, it is thought to hunt at night on the ground, and use its climbing abilities to escape predation (5). It feeds on small mammals and birds, which can sometimes include domestic poultry and ducks (2) (5), and local people report that this elusive cat emerges after heavy rains to feed on the rodents and frogs that also surface (5).

Rusty-spotted cats give birth in spring in India (8). **Gestation** lasts for around 67 days, after which the female gives birth to one or two kittens in a secluded den, such as a shallow cave (2) (5). The kittens are born blind (5), and their coat lacks the rusty spots of the adults (8).

## THREATS

The rusty-spotted cat is known to be rare, but there is little else known about the status of this small and secretive cat (2). Deforestation and the spread of agriculture pose a serious threat for much of the wildlife in India and Sri Lanka, and this is likely to impact the rusty-spotted cat too. Whilst observed in cultivated landscapes, it is not yet known whether it can survive in such modified habitats (5). The rusty-spotted cat is reported to be killed by local people when it takes domestic poultry (4), and it is also frequently mistaken for baby leopards in Sri Lanka and killed (2). In some parts of the cat's range the flesh is considered edible and a number are taken for this purpose (2). There are some reports of **hybridisation** with domestic cats, which could threaten the existence of the species, but these reports have not yet been proved (5).

## CONSERVATION

The Indian population is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), meaning that trade in individuals from this population is only permitted in exceptional circumstances, and the Sri Lankan population is listed on Appendix II, meaning that trade should be carefully monitored to ensure it is compatible with the species' survival (4). The rusty-spotted cat is also legally protected throughout most of its range and hunting is prohibited (5). It is encouraging that such protective measures are in place, but the rusty-spotted cat will benefit from research into its distribution, ecological and habitat requirements, to identify conservation measures necessary to ensure this tiny cat's survival (3).

## FIND OUT MORE

For further information on the rusty-spotted cat see:

- International Society for Endangered Cats: <http://www.wildcatconservation.org/wild-cats/asia/rusty-spotted-cat/>

## AUTHENTICATION

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## GLOSSARY

- **Gestation:** the state of being pregnant; the period from conception to birth.
- **Hybridisation:** cross-breeding between two different species or subspecies.
- **Nocturnal:** active at night.

## REFERENCES

1. IUCN Red List (October, 2016)  
<http://www.iucnredlist.org>
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7. Vyas, V.R., Lakhmapurkar, J.J. and Gavali, D. (December, 2014) Sighting of rusty-spotted cat from new localities in central Gujarat State, India. *Cat News* 46: 18.
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