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OBSERVATION OF JUNGLE CAT (*FELIS CHAUS*) AT TROPICAL FOREST RESEARCH INSTITUTE, CAMPUS, JABALPUR, MADHYA PRADESH

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While on a morning walk at Tropical Forest Research Institute, Campus, Jabalpur on 26th May, 2010 at about 7:00 am hours a wild cat crossed road in front of me. It suddenly jumped and disappeared in the near vicinity. The cat was chased in the nearby shrubs and the sheltered places but could not find again that day. Later, the jungle cat was regularly observed in the morning and evening hours within the TFRI campus often seen in search of prey. This cat was sighted for the first time in TFRI campus during my 4 years stay. It is not clear whether this cat was present in the TFRI campus earlier and could not be sighted or that it came from surrounding forest or protected areas recently. The wild cat was identified as jungle cat, *Felis chaus* Schreber.

Class MAMMAL

Family FELIDAE

Felis chaus Schreber, 1777, **Jungle Cat**

1777. *Felis chaus* Schreber, *Die Säugethiere*, 2(13) : pl. 1101 B; text, 3(24) : 414.

The Tropical Forests Research Institute's (TFRI) campus is situated on the bank of the Gour River on Mandla Road (79°59'23.50"E and 21°08'54.30"N) about 10 km south east of Jabalpur on NH-12A. The campus is spread over an area of 109 ha with various research laboratories/divisions, administrative building, scientists hostel and a guest house. The TFRI also has various experimental fields and forest nurseries amidst picturesque surroundings. The area enjoys semi-arid type of climate with mean annual precipitation of 1358 mm. The several species of shrubs and trees are either planted or naturally occur in the institute's campus area. The campus is surrounded by agricultural field with rural inhabitation. The water reservoir, poultry farm and the vegetation planted around the institute have created a very good habitat and source of attraction

for number of faunal species like insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

The mammals are one of the most diverse and versatile class of the animal kingdom due to the highly developed brain (Primates). The cat family Felidae is an important family of the class mammal consisting of big cats like lion (*Panther leo persica*), tiger (*Panthera tigris*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) and other small cats.

The jungle cat is widely observed around forest plantations and sugarcane fields that are scattered within their natural habitat in Tropical Asia (Tikader, 1983). From Madhya Pradesh the jungle cat has so far been reported from Narbada valley protected areas, Kanha National Park, Bandhvgarh National Park and Chhattishgarh (Sinha, 1977; Khajuria & Ghosal, 1981; Ghose & Bhattacharya, 1995; Kushwaha & Kumar, 1999 and Harshey and Chandra, 2002). The species of the jungle cat identified as *Felis chaus* is commonly called in different Indian languages as: in Hindi- Jungli Billi, Ban Bilao, Khattas; Bengali-Wab, Ban Beral; Tamil-Kadu Poona; Kannada-Bokana Kotti and in Marathi-Ran Manjar. Identification, classification and conservation status has been followed as per Alfred, *et al.* (2002 & 2006). Abbreviations used in the text are IWPA= Indian Wildlife Protection Act; CITES = Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species; CAMP and DD = Data Deficient.

Observation Localities : The movement of the jungle cat was mostly observed regularly in and around hostel, guest house, backside of the silviculture and extension divisions and in forest nurseries and experimental fields where human disturbance is least at TFRI campus from May 2010 to September, 2010.

Habit & Habitat : The activities of the jungle cat were observed whenever sighted in the TFRI Campus and in various sub-localities. The surrounding trees and grasses provided ideal hiding and shelter niches for the jungle cat while hunting. The cat sits near the trees or on deep slopes waiting and watch the birds and squirrels which are being preyed upon by the jungle cat as soon as they come closer and finally catch and kill the prey. Sometimes the jungle cat waits for long in their hiding places for the prey. On being disturbed they run inside the dense vegetation in the campus where they are not spotted easily.

Food : The most favourite food of the jungle cat at TFRI, Jabalpur was birds and rodents. The most preferred food was the most common birds species in and around the TFRI campus belonging to family Columbidae (Pigeon and doves) : *Columba livia* Gmelin, 1789 (Blue Rock Pigeon), *Streptopelia chinensis* Scopoli, 1786 (Spotted Dove), *Streptopelia tranquebarica* Hermann, 1804 (Red Collared-Dove), *Streptopelia decaocto* Frivaldszky, 1838 (Eurasian Collared-Dove), *Streptopelia senegalensis*, Linnaeus, 1766 (Little Brown Dove or laughing Dove) and other important bird family Phasianidae (Quail) : *Coturnix coturnix* Linnaeus, 1758 (Common Quail) and *Perdica asiatica* Latham, 1790 (Jungle Bush Quail). The second most preferred food group of the jungle cat was *Funambulus pennanti* (Five Stripped Squirrel), a rodent belonging to family Sciuridae. The pigeons, doves, quails and squirrels often

come on ground for feeding and this is the time they are easily preyed by the jungle cat.

Distribution : Throughout India. *Elsewhere :* Afghanistan, Algeria, Benin, China, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Syria, Thailand, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia Zimbabwe and Asia Minor to Transcaucasia and north along the west coast of the Caspian sea to the lower reaches of the Volga and east through Turkmenistan, Tadjikistan, and Kazakhstan to Chinese Turkestan (Ogurlu *et al.*, 2010).

Threats : The dog was major threat to jungle cat in TFRI Campus. It was observed that several times, whenever dog sighted jungle cat on road or in plantations or near the forest trees and shrubs. They were suddenly run towards jungle cat and chased long distance but dog never caught the jungle cat. The jungle cat was many times escaped and took shelter in dense vegetation to save from dog.

Conservation Status : Indian Wildlife Protection Act IWPA, Schedule-II, Part-II; CITES : Appendix-II; CAMP : LRnt (Nationally) and DD (Globally).

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Fig. 1. Jungle Cat watching their preys in dense vegetation of TFRI, Campus, Jabalpur.