

Timid fishing cat needs human co-operation for survival

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Fishing cats, locally known as Bagrole, have been spotted in Rishra Bagkhal area and Kannaipur, Nabagram in Konnagar. Pug marks and CCTV footage have confirmed the presence of fishing cats in the area.

The forest department and environmentalists have asked local people not to panic over the movement and presence of the animals, since it is timid in nature and shy of human beings.

There are no instances where fishing cats have attacked human beings, on the contrary this endangered animal has often been mer-

cilessly killed by man.

The fishing cat is fast losing its natural habitat due to indiscriminate filling and destruction of water bodies found in urban and rural areas.

Mr. Rabindranath Banerjee, the range officer, Hooghly said: "It is wrong to say that the fishing cats are moving into the nearest human habitation. Actually we human beings are encroaching into the natural habitat of some wild animals which play a vital role in maintaining the eco-system. Previously with the abundance of green cover and water bodies within and adjacent to human habitation, fishing cats, tortoise, snakes, rats, owls and birds of various

kinds and others existed without coming into direct conflict with human beings. There is no need to panic about fishing cats. They are timid and human-shy animals. We should be equally concerned and caring towards fishing cats as we are towards our local dogs and cats. Every animal on the earth also has the right to survive."

The fishing cat (*Prionailurus Viverrinus*) is a medium-sized wild cat found in several areas of south and south east Asia. Since 2016, it has been listed as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN red list. The fishing cat population is threatened by destruction of wetlands and has declined severely over the last decades.

The fishing cats usually live in the vicinity of Wetlands, ponds, lakes, rivers, streams, oxbow lakes and in swamps and mangroves.

Sumit Kumar Moulik, project officer of Natural Environment and Wild Life Society today carried out a spot investigation of the pug marks and also confirmed the presence of a few fishing cats in the area.

Mr Moulik said, "The local name of fishing cat, Bagrole, is itself a misnomer, as in Bengali 'Bag' means tiger and common people often confuse it with members of the tiger, leopard and panther family, since the body stripes are very similar to those of the tiger."

