

Asiatic Golden cats caught on camera trap

Four different types were sighted at altitudes between 2,500m and 4,000m at various parks of the country.



Four different types of Asiatic golden cat (*catopuma temminicki*) were sighted in the country on a camera trap between 2008 and 2010. A medium sized-wild cat, Asian golden cats range in body length from 30 – 41 inches with males usually larger than females.

Of the four colour morphs, resembling jaguars, common morph was spotted at an altitude of 4,033m in Jigme Dorji National Park, grey morph at 3,900m in Wangduephodrang, the black or melanistic morph at 2,896m in Trongsa and the ocelot morph was sighted in the high mountains of the Jigme Singye Wangchuck national park.

From the 13 recorded Asiatic golden cats, 11 were recorded on camera traps, one detected through skin and another by direct sighting. A report on the four colour morphs published recently on CAT news of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUNC) stated the Asiatic golden cat range extends from eastern Himalayas of Nepal, Bhutan and northeast India.

The cats are also sighted south of Bangladesh, east to China and south again to Southeast Asia, covering Myanmar, Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Penin- sular Malaysia and Indonesia.

Department of Forest and Park Services senior forest officer Karma Jigme said none of these range countries so far reported of having all varieties. “Having all the types in Bhutan signifies country’s strong conservation policy,” he said. The benefit of publishing the report in the journal would draw international attention and give room for scientists, conservationists and cat specialists to conduct study on the big cats and thus know Bhutan.

The species was listed as near threatened in the 2008 IUCN list with habitat loss, poaching for its pelt and bones, killing of its prey species and retaliatory killings for livestock depredation. Most golden cat records, Karma Jigme said are from lowland and hilly forests, where it inhabits evergreen, deciduous and bamboo forest. “Occasionally it has been reported to occur in open, rocky areas, and foothill grass-land,” he said. “It’s quite unusual that it has been sighted in Bhutan, which is at a higher altitude.” The highest altitude record for the species was once

recorded in Sikkim that mentioned the presence of a melanistic golden cat at a an altitude of 3,960m.

In Bhutan, the cat was camera trapped at 3,738m where dwarf rhododendron grow and other grasslands. The country is known to be home to about eight of which fishing cat, phallus and cynx were recorded based on foot prints.

By Tenzin Namgyel