

# WORLD'S FIRST FISHING CAT CENSUS DONE IN CHILIKA

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The Chilika Lake, Asia's largest brackish water lagoon, has 176 fishing cats, according to a census conducted by the Chilika Development Authority (CDA) in collaboration with the Fishing Cat Project (TFCP).

This is the world's first population estimation of the fishing cat, which has been conducted outside the protected area network.

According to the CDA, the estimation was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 was conducted in 2021 in the 115 sq.km marshland in the north and north-eastern section of Chilika and its surrounding areas. Phase 2 was conducted in 2022 in the Parikud side along the coastal islands of Chilika.

## 150 camera traps

A total of 150 camera traps were deployed in two phases with each fixed in the field for 30 days. Spatially explicit capture recapture (SECR) method was used to analyse the data, the CDA said in a statement here.

"It was truly participatory in spirit since local fishermen and villagers of Chilika were the primary participants in this exercise. Without their support, the world's first such population estimation outside protected areas on this globally threatened cat, would not have been possible," said Susanta Nanda, Chief Executive Officer, CDA.

"Ten graduate and postgraduate students also volunteered during the exercise. Chilika Wildlife Division staff actively facilitated and participated in the population estimation. Such a participatory effort involving multiple stakeholders for studying this elusive and threatened species sets a wonderful precedent," said Partha Dey, co-founder, TFCP.

## Found in 10 countries

The CDA says fishing cats are globally threatened cats that occur in wetlands such as marshlands, mangroves and flooded forests in major South and Southeast Asian river basins starting from the Indus in Pakistan till the Mekong in Vietnam and in the island nations of Sri Lanka and Java. They are found in 10 Asian countries but have remained undetected in Vietnam and Java since the last decade or so.

"Wetlands in Asia are being lost at alarmingly rapid rates and proper data on their current status or even baseline data in many countries are missing. The status of many wetland species remains understudied and highly threatened. Tracking specialist species such as the fishing cat gives us an indication of what might be happening to these ecosystems, which are safeguards against climate change and droughts," says Tiasa Adhya, co-founder, TFCP.

Earlier this year, CDA had declared its intent to adopt a five-year action plan for fishing cat conservation in Chilika.



“In collaboration with TFCP, we are soon going to share a fishing cat action plan that is socio-ecological in essence. We have already begun a year-long patrolling and monitoring programme on the cat and its sympatric species. Along with upscaling it, we will promote sustainably and traditionally harvested wetland products to prevent wetland conversion, establish a rescue and rehabilitation centre, promote small-scale experiential and educative wetland tourism, adopt habitat restoration programs as well as education programmes,” Mr. Nanda said.

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Tiasa Adhya

Co-founder, The Fishing Cat Project

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