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# news



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# First camera trap image of Asiatic golden cat in Nepal

**A camera trapping survey conducted in Makalu-Barun National Park in eastern Nepal in April-May 2009 has yielded the picture of a melanistic Asiatic golden cat *Pardofelis temminckii*. It was taken on 9 May 2009 at 1:26 PM in the site located at 27°35.336'N/87°07.568'E on 2517 m above sea level. The elevation range of the study area is 1780-2700 m and the habitats are dominated by the *Schima-Castanopsis* forests.**

This photographic record of the Asiatic golden cat is the first of its kind in Nepal. The area where the photo was taken is a small grassland adjoining the larger grassland called Maghan tar. Tar refers to an open place in the hills in Nepal. Initially uncertain, the species of a photographed cat was later positively recognized as the Asiatic golden cat (A. Appel, J. Sanderson, A. Sliwa, L. Grassman, K. Nowell, pers. comm.).

The Asiatic golden cat is one of the least studied wild cats in Nepal and elsewhere in tropical Asia (Nowell & Jackson 1996, Grassman et al. 2005, Traylor et al. 2005, Hearn et al. 2008, Kawanishi & Sunquist 2008). It preys mostly on small mammals, reptiles and birds but is capable of taking larger prey such as sheep, goats and buffalo calves (Grassman et al. 2005, Hearn et al. 2008, Kawanishi & Sunquist 2008). The key habitats are forests and open spaces, reaching the heights of over 3000 m in the Himalayas (Baral & Shah 2008, Biswas & Ghose 1982). The principal threats are deforestation, indiscriminate snaring and poaching for pelts and bones, which place the species as Near Threatened in the 2009 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Hearn et al. 2008). Nepal is believed to be the westernmost part of the Asiatic golden cat's range (Ellerman & Morrison-Scott 1966, Hodgson 1831) however no specimen have been recorded in the country (Karan Bdr. Shah, pers. comm.). Information about the status of this species in Nepal is lacking, and much more is needed to understand its conservation needs.

Frequent camera-trap images and recorded observations of barking deer *Muntiacus muntjak*, Assamese macaque *Macaca assamensis*, orange-bellied Himalayan squirrel *Dremomys lokriah*, kalij pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*, hill partridge *Arborophila torqueola* and rufous-throated partridge *Arborophila rufogularis* indicate a very good prey base in Makalu-Barun National Park.

Hunting pressure in the study area is low. Sherpa people living inside the park believe in the principle of non-violence. In contrast, people of the Singsawa tribe living in the north-eastern part of the park occasionally come for hunting, herb collection and wildlife trade. The route Khadbari-Num-Hatiya-Chyamthang-Kimathanka-Tibet is an age-old route for the illegal wildlife trade. There is a strong need for implementation of community development programs that also tackle indigenous practices of poaching. Research and conservation projects of the Asiatic golden cat and other felids in the study area should be prioritized in the near future.

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**Fig. 1.** Melanistic Asiatic golden cat in Makalu-Barun National Park, Nepal (Photo Friends of Nature).