

Biodiversity Record: Recent sightings of mainland leopard cats on Pulau Ubin

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Subjects: Mainland leopard cat, *Prionailurus bengalensis* (Mammalia: Carnivora: Felidae).

Subjects identified by: Marcus A. H. Chua.

Location, date and time: Pulau Ubin; 2 March, 8 October and 19 November 2021; 1945 and 2020 hrs (refer to Observations).

Habitats: Back mangrove (2 March 2021), secondary coastal forest (8 October 2021) and edge of secondary forest (19 November 2021).

Observers: Firdaus Said (2 March 2021), Kanghao Yu (8 October 2021), Robbin Tan and Matt Henricksen (19 November 2021).

Observations: Three sightings are herein recorded —

1. One individual was photographed on the ground in a patch of back mangrove at 2020 hrs on 2 March 2021 by Firdaus Said (Fig. 1). It immediately moved out of the observer's sight after the picture was taken.
2. An example was observed on the ground in the western coastal forest at 1945 hrs on 8 October 2021 by Kanghao Yu (Fig. 2A). It stayed at the spot for about five minutes before disappearing into the forest. The remains of a freshly dead rat discovered at the site (Fig. 2B) were presumed to be left by the cat.
3. One example was seen on the ground at the edge of secondary forest next to human habitation at 2020 hrs on 19 November 2021 by Robbin Tan and Matt Henricksen (Figs. 3, 4). First detected by its eye-shine, the cat allowed the observers to approach to within 10 metres before it fled. It was found shortly after, and the observers managed to photograph it from a distance of about four metres. The animal was not aggressive and tolerated the observers for about 20 seconds before disappearing quickly and silently into the undergrowth.

Remarks: From the markings on the animals in the photographs, it is clear that the animals in the latter two observations (8 October and 19 November 2021) are different individuals. Owing to the low image resolution and lack of consistent angles, it is not clear if the leopard cat from the first sighting (2 March 2021) is the same as either of the two other individuals. Leopard cats in Singapore are known to travel more than 2 km within their home range (Chua et al., 2016), and the distances from the second and third sightings to the first are within the movement distance of the species.

The mainland leopard cat has been recorded on Pulau Ubin in 1997 and 2014 (Nathan, 1997; Fung et al., 2017). The increased frequency of observations of these animals on the island in recent years suggests that there is a resident population there. Elsewhere in Singapore, this species is also present on the island of Tekong (Chua et al., 2016; Lim et al., 2016), and on Singapore Island in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve and Western Catchment Area (Chua, 2015a, 2015b; Wan et al., 2021). The mainland leopard cat is the last species of wild cat in Singapore and is considered nationally critically endangered (Lim et al., 2008).



Fig. 1. Leopard cat in back mangroves, Pulau Ubin, on 2 March 2021. (Photograph by: Firdaus Said).

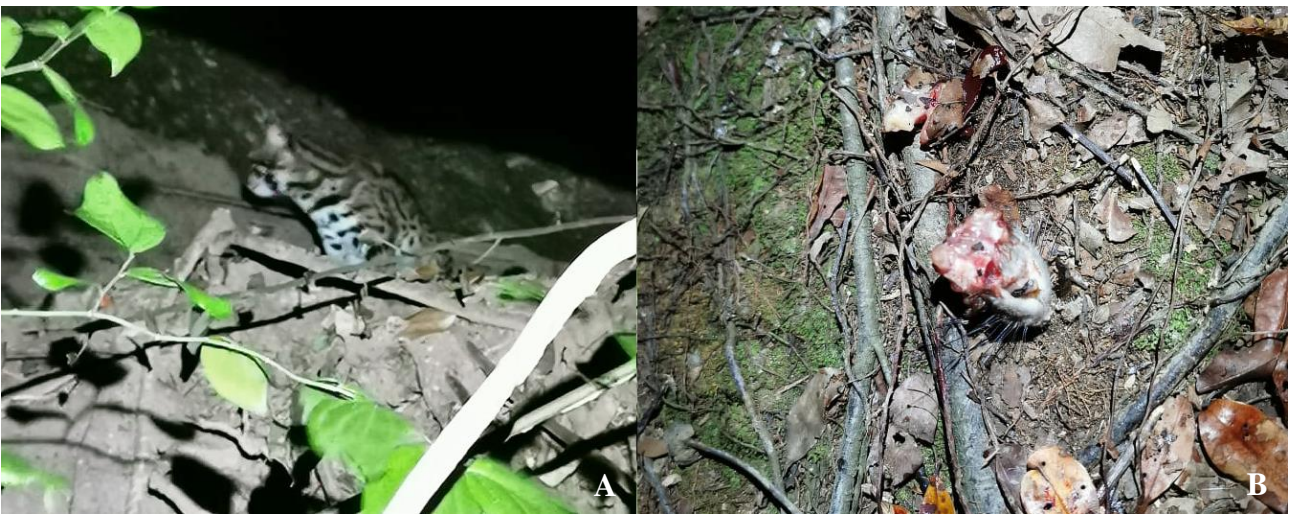


Fig. 2. Leopard cat in coastal forest, Pulau Ubin, on 8 October 2021 (A), and the half-consumed head of a rat apparently abandoned by the cat (B). (Photographs by: Kanghao Yu).



Fig. 3. Two frontal views of the leopard cat in secondary forest, Pulau Ubin, on 19 November 2021. (Photographs by: Robbin Tan).



Fig. 4. Leopard cat partially concealed in the undergrowth on 19 November 2021. (Photograph by: Matt Henricksen).

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