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JSUSHANTO GOUDA¹, JANMEJAY SETHY² AND NPS CHAUHAN^{1*}

First photo capture of Asiatic golden cat in Dampa Tiger Reserve, Mizoram, India

The Asiatic golden cat *Catopuma temminckii* also known as the Temminck's cat is a medium-size elusive wild cat distributed throughout South Asia. It is classified as Near Threatened by IUCN and as Scheduled I species by Indian Wildlife Protection Act. Very modest information is available on this cat and it is rarely seen in the wild. Dampa Tiger Reserve along the international border with Bangladesh remained one of the least explored areas of north-east India. Two male Asiatic golden cats were photo-captured using passive camera trap units during November and December 2015. The photographs confirm the presence of Asiatic Golden cat in the reserve and therefore, a detailed study on the population status and ecology of the Asiatic golden cat is recommended for its long-term conservation.

The Asiatic Golden cat also known as Temminck's cat is a medium-sized wild elusive and the largest among the small group of oriental felines with the exception of clouded leopard (Bashir et al. 2011). The Asiatic Golden cat is listed as Near Threatened in the IUCN Red List (McCarthy et al. 2016) and is also an Appendix I species as listed by CITES. It is a Scheduled I species according to the Indian Wildlife Protection Act (1972). Asiatic golden cats are known to occur in forested habitats, including dry deciduous forest, evergreen forest and tropical rainforest, as well as in more open habitats such as shrubs and grasslands distributed throughout South Asia, from Nepal and parts of China to peninsular Malaysia and Sumatra (Choudhury 2007). Recent records within Asia and South Asia include photo-captures in Thailand (Grassman et al. 2005), Bhutan (Wang 2007, Vernes et al. 2015, Dhendup 2016), Nepal (Ghimirey & Pal 2009), Cambo-

dia (Gray et al. 2014), Myanmar (Zaw et al. 2014), Nakai Nam Theun National park, Lao PDR (Coudrat et al. 2014), Vietnam (Willcox et al. 2014), Sumatra, Indonesia (Pusparini et al. 2014) and Huai Kha Khaeng National Park Thailand (Simcharoen et al. 2014). In India, they have been photographed in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh (Datta et al. 2008, Lyngdoh et al. 2011), Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve, Sikkim (Bashir et al. 2011), and Manas National Park in Assam (Choudhury 2007). There is very little information published on this cat and it is rarely seen in the wild (Jutzeler et al. 2010). So, few data clearly indicate a paucity of information on basic ecology of the specie in India. Dampa Tiger Reserve, the biggest protected area in Mizoram is situated in the western part of Mizoram along the international border with Bangladesh. It was notified in 1985 and declared a Tiger Reserve in 1994. It covers an area of approximately 550 km² and

falls within 23°35'48.11" N Longitudes and 92°23'40.70" E Longitudes (Renthlei et al. 2011). It has remained one of the least explored areas of north-east India and till date, very few studies have been taken up to record its faunal richness.

As a part of our study on Malayan sun bear, camera traps were placed in a grid of 3×3 km at different location in Dampa Tiger Reserve. Two Asiatic Golden cats were photo captured using passive camera trap units at two different sites. The first cat was photo-captured on 11 of November, 2015 at 5:55 h (23.410656° N / 92.222189° E) while moving near the Indian Reserve Police camp and the second was photo-captured on the 18 of December, 2015 at 22:26 h (23.384920° N / 92.221962° E) on the New Chikha road of Dampa Tiger Reserve at an altitude of 653 m and 617 m, respectively (Fig. 1). Both individuals were males and photo-captured while they were moving. The vegetation in the habitat of their occurrence was tropical semi-evergreen with mix trees such as *Ficus actissima*, *Pyrus pashia*, *Ficus racemosa*, *Tetrarameles nudiflora* and *Mesua ferrea*. Hence, the photographs confirmed the presence of Asiatic Golden cat in the reserve. We recommend undertaking a detailed study on the population status and ecology of the Asiatic Golden cat in Dampa Tiger Reserve for the long-term conservation of the species.

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Fig. 1. Photo captures of Asiatic Golden cat in Dampa Tiger Reserve.

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