

Fishing Cat Recorded for the first time in Pursat, Tonle Sap, Evidence Wetland Reforestation Is Working

Confirmation of the rare cat highlights the impact of long-term community-led restoration in one of Southeast Asia's most important freshwater ecosystems.

Pursat, Tonle Sap, Cambodia (World Wetlands Day, February 2, 2026) – A fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*), one of Asia's most elusive small wild cats, has been confirmed for the first time in the restored flooded forest of Pursat, around Tonle Sap Lake—marking a major milestone in the 15-year conservation effort. Conservation International, in collaboration with the Royal Government of Cambodia, local communities, and partners, confirmed the sighting after an individual was photographed 46 times by camera traps in mid-2025.

Ms. Vanessa Herranz Muñoz, Director of the Fishing Cat Ecological Enterprise (FCEE) and member of both the Fishing Cat Working Group and the IUCN SSC Cat Specialist Group, recently confirmed the images are of a fishing cat, noting, “The Fishing Cat is globally categorized as Vulnerable, but records in Southeast Asia are very scarce and its population in Cambodia is likely small. This is only the second confirmed record in the entire Tonle Sap area and gives us great hope for the recovery of this unique water-loving feline species.”

The fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) is native to South and Southeast Asia and is listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List, with fewer than 10,000 mature individuals estimated globally. The charismatic aquatic cats are solitary, nocturnal hunters, about twice the size of a house cat, with partially webbed front paws and semi-retractable claws, making them expert swimmers that dive and scoop fish, though they also eat rodents, birds, and reptiles. In Cambodia, confirmed records of fishing cats are extremely scarce, and include sightings from Kulen Promtep Wildlife Sanctuary, coastal mangroves areas, Ream National Park, and the Tonle Chhmar Ramsar site. Monitoring efforts are often challenged by misidentification with the more common mainland leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*).

Mr. Sony Oum, Country Director of Conservation International Cambodia, said, “The fishing cat's return is a testament to long-term, science-based wetland restoration and community-led conservation. By restoring ecological health, we are supporting biodiversity, while also strengthening climate resilience and livelihoods.”

H.E. Dith Tina, Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, said, “The confirmed presence of the fishing cat in the flooded forests of Tonle Sap is a strong responsive signal from the nature to our long-term management of fisheries and flooded forest ecosystems. It is the living proof of the results from our commitment. It underscores the importance of restoring and safeguarding these habitats, not only for biodiversity conservation but also for sustaining fisheries and the livelihoods of communities that depend on healthy wetlands.”

H.E. Dr. Eang Sophalleth, Minister of the Ministry of Environment, said in relation to the finding of fishing cats in Pursat's Tonle Sap Lake, “Such finding is an important evidence not only to highlight return of the biodiversity species within the protected areas in Cambodia but also to confirm the effectiveness of Cambodia's national policies, including the Circular Strategy on Environment, and

the efforts of the Royal Government of Cambodia and stakeholders to actively and effectively conserve, manage, and develop the environment and natural resources, especially in contributing to building a clean and green Cambodia today and in the future. It also reflects Cambodia's strong commitment to engaging with the world to respond to the NDC 3.0 and to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), implemented through strong partnerships, and to contribute to a greener future for the next generations to come."

Since 2010, Conservation International, in collaboration with 16 local fishing communities, the Fisheries Administration and the Ministry of Environment, has restored more than 1,000 hectares of degraded flooded forest around Tonle Sap. The restoration effort includes replanting native trees and encouraging habitat protection, as well as community patrols, implementing fire prevention measures, and directly supporting the livelihoods of the communities in the areas.

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Footage of the Camera Trap Could Be Found Here: [Link](#). Please credit as: Supplied by Conservation International



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