



As an apex predator, the enigmatic feline that is the fishing cat plays a crucial role in regulating prey populations. PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Our efforts can save the fishing cat from extinction

Faraz Islam is a writer and an avid wildlife conservationist.

FARAZ ISLAM

You might know that cats hate water, and you'd be entirely correct. But there is one major exception to this rule. The fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) is an expert swimmer, around twice the size of a housecat, that loves to hunt in water. It is a beautiful animal, sporting an olive-grey coat decorated with spots and stripes of black. The cat primarily feasts on fish, which it catches using its fascinating retractable claws. Primarily found in wetland habitats where prey is abundant, they have been recorded in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and India. In West Bengal, the fishing cat is the state animal.

However, this captivating cat is in danger of extinction. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List of Threatened Species, the fishing cat population has declined by over 30 percent globally in the last 15 years, being extirpated from the entirety of the Indonesian island of Java in the process. In Bangladesh, too, the fishing cat faces challenges of its own. Often mistaken for tigers, media reports are rife with tales of these majestic creatures being butchered by disillusioned local villagers. The fishing cat must also contend with other issues such as the degradation of its wetland habitats, illegal wildlife trade, and inadequate funding for its conservation.

On the issue of funding, from 2007 to 2013, the seven big cat species – lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, pumas, cheetahs, and snow leopards – received the lion's share of over 99 percent of the cat conservation funds, while the 33 small cat species were left with a meagre fraction of funds. This poses a significant challenge for the efforts to save small wild cats, such as the fishing cat, who face the same intensity of threats as their larger cousins but on substantially fewer funds with which to negotiate these challenges.

As an apex predator, the enigmatic feline that is the fishing cat plays a crucial role in regulating prey populations. Its extinction would have cascading effects on the ecological balance of a delicate ecosystem. It is crucial that the fishing cat be allowed to survive, and thrive, for the benefit of a wetland habitat that has an already dwindling health.

In Bangladesh, the fight to save the species crossed a major milestone in 2012 with the establishment of Project Fishing Cat. Founded by conservation biologist Sayam U Chowdhury, Project Fishing Cat works in one of the fishing cat hotspots in the Hail haor, at the northeast of the

country. For the last ten years, this project has been studying fishing cats and mitigating conflicts with locals, saving many felines in the process.

"Here, the main challenge is to conserve its habitat outside protected areas since fishing cats occur widely in various habitat types including villages. So saving these pockets of homestead landscapes is extremely difficult," says Chowdhury. "Secondly, many people think the fishing cat is a big threat and often misidentify [it] as a dangerous animal... and end up killing it or can kill it just for fun!"

Because of the fishing cat's wide and discontinuous range in isolated pockets across the country, a lot of its habitat falls in unprotected lands, where there are more people and therefore more likelihood of conflict occurring. The fishing

Because of the fishing cat's wide and discontinuous range in isolated pockets across the country, a lot of its habitat falls in unprotected lands, where there are more people and therefore more likelihood of conflict occurring. Often mistaken for tigers, media reports are rife with tales of these majestic creatures being butchered by disillusioned local villagers. But we in Bangladesh should now do our part to find a way to coexist with this important species.

cat may sometimes attack the locals' livestock for food (as they are an easy target), thus angering the locals who then feel driven to kill the animal. But, as Chowdhury iterates, people often end up killing it for other reasons too, with very little to no logic in doing so.

The fishing cat is fighting for its survival, trying to adapt to new circumstances resulting from human activity. For instance, in Sri Lanka, the fishing cat has crept into the urban landscape as the only known urban population of fishing cats in the world. We in Bangladesh should now do our part to find a way to coexist with this important species in their natural habitat, and improve the public's perception of them, so that unnecessary killings are eliminated. The fishing cat will not be saved overnight. There is no silver bullet when it comes to conservation, and no magic wand we can wave to make all the problems threatening an animal's existence go away. But with the right planning and execution, the fishing cat can make its way back from the verge of extinction.

Unplanned transport infrastructure ails both Dhaka and Bangkok



Dr Nawshad Ahmed is a former UN official, an economist and urban planner. His latest book is "The Urbanization Challenge and Role of Municipalities in Bangladesh: A Case for Boosting Investment in Urban Areas"

NAWSHAD AHMED

During my recent visit to Bangkok, I gathered enough insight into the megacity's notorious traffic problems. I found these issues to be, in many ways, comparable to Dhaka's intolerable traffic congestion. Dhaka and Bangkok, the capitals of Thailand and Bangladesh, respectively, share the common characteristic of an uncontrollable flow of people making them the primate cities of their respective countries. No other cities in either country are comparable to the capitals in terms of total population and scale of economic activities. Bangkok's total population is over 11 million and land area is around 1,568 sq km, while Dhaka has a total estimated population of 22 million across a land area of 1,353 sq km. This means that Bangkok holds around 15 percent of Thailand's total population of 71 million, while nearly 13 percent of Bangladesh's total population resides in Dhaka city.

The lengthy gridlock of cars can be seen throughout these cities all day, but is more intense during the mornings when people go to work and in the evenings when they return home. Meanwhile, the polluted air from cars remains unbearable for pedestrians and street vendors in both cities. Despite many new transport infrastructures being built in Bangkok over the years, including the BTS Skytrain and expressways, the increasing population density coupled with a rapid increase in the number of private vehicles in the past decades has rendered these efforts less impactful. The preference of most residents to use private cars results from the difficulty of walking long distances to get to the train station. The fare for the BTS Skytrain is also high. Another mode of public transport in Bangkok is the bus service. But this is also not adequate and has a limited capacity. In Dhaka, on the other hand, while the availability of buses is not a problem, they are not comfortable. Most are not air-conditioned and do not cater separately to the needs of women and children.

The creation of an urban transport system requires heavy public investment. But this may not

always deliver the desired outcome, which is to provide relief to the city's residents who suffer as a result of heavy traffic jams. The popular belief is that public transport can solve congestion. However, if a city becomes too crowded and if enough roads are not built with a sound masterplan, the city is unlikely to get rid of traffic congestion. Dhaka and Bangkok both expanded without adequate use of land and proper planning of transit for citizens. Both these cities grew without sufficient space on the roads. For instance, while Tokyo has a 23 percent road-to-area ratio and New York has 32 percent, Bangkok has only eight percent and Dhaka has around seven percent. This defeats the purpose of building an expensive public transport network as it may prove to be inadequate in cities where too many people live on a small area of land and without adequate road space.

Population density is a very important factor in determining the movement of people and goods within an urban area. This should be pre-planned rather than left to people's individual choice to build structures and cause the density to become too high, as has been the case for both Dhaka and Bangkok. A reasonable level of density should be maintained in a city to allow for the smooth movement of people. But both the cities in discussion have been overbuilt and are responsible for creating an unbalanced urban pattern in their respective countries. Dhaka and Bangkok are both administrative as well as economic capitals. Dhaka city has grown without a physical plan for over a century and only got a masterplan in 1959. This plan and other masterplans following it were never properly implemented. Thus, Dhaka's traffic system is quite chaotic, with residents spending long hours on the congested roads every day.

The popularity of private cars worsens traffic congestion due to the amount of road space they occupy while carrying only a small number of commuters. For both Dhaka and Bangkok, if traffic jams are to be reduced, the citizens should be

convinced about the merits of using public transport. For this, the quality of service, safety, and efficiency in public transport must be improved. At the same time, the city authorities must have forethought and build adequate roads before human settlements can take root in potential urban areas around Dhaka and Bangkok, which have so far witnessed unplanned development. The planning authorities of these cities must adhere to zoning regulations strictly, as this will help solve traffic problems in newly urbanised areas. Decentralisation of economic activities to other cities must also be undertaken in order to reduce pressure on the capital cities.

In addition, to reduce wastage of national resources, another target should be to minimise the average fuel use per capita. The operating cost for vehicles increases due to traffic congestion, as excess amounts of fuel and lubricants are burned while also adding to the maintenance cost of vehicles. Both Dhaka and Bangkok either share the same types of transport infrastructure or have plans for these, such as a metro rail, elevated expressways, bypass roads, flyovers, underground trains, etc. The expectation is that these will help to reduce traffic congestion. However, alongside these, it is crucial that the cities consider other non-infrastructure solutions such as density reduction, designating decentralised business and economic zones in other towns/cities, and provide incentives to citizens who need not be living in the capital to relocate to suburban areas. If the governments create industrial zones and growth centres in different areas of the country, and arrange quality health and other services there, people will feel less inclined to only settle in the capital city.

In both cities, there are laws against illegal parking of vehicles and against the use of roads and footpaths for business purposes, but these practices are commonplace. To solve this, authorities must earmark parking areas and prohibit the illegal parking of cars. Many areas of these cities have been overtaken by indiscriminate construction of high-rise buildings, mixed with hospitals, schools, hotels, and shops, causing traffic congestion to reach intolerable levels. The town planning standards of both cities should be strictly followed in order to make people's lives comfortable. No narrow roads should be without drainage systems, and newly developed areas must include bicycle lanes and footpaths.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**

1 Dull finish

6 Fire remnants

11 Clear sky

12 Kick in

13 Very thin

14 Sum of one's actions

15 Capitol Bldg. figure

16 Ohio college

18 Numerical prefix

19 "Gnarly!"

20 Conclude

21 Hiker's burden

23 Blackjack call

25 Young one

27 Some answers

28 Make fresh

30 Rocker Collins

33 Brooks of film
- 34 Baseball's Ripken

36 Purpose

37 Shipping ban

39 Monk's title

40 Mythical weeper

41 Until now

43 Fashion

44 TV's De-Generes

45 Cart pullers

46 Film units
- 6 Did a bulter's job

7 Flag feature

8 Colson

Whitehead novel

9 Kingly fur

10 Position

17 Derisive cry

22 Relatives

24 Spinning toy

26 Fiats

28 Sends, as payment

29 Funny fellow

31 Jordan neighbor

32 Gets wise

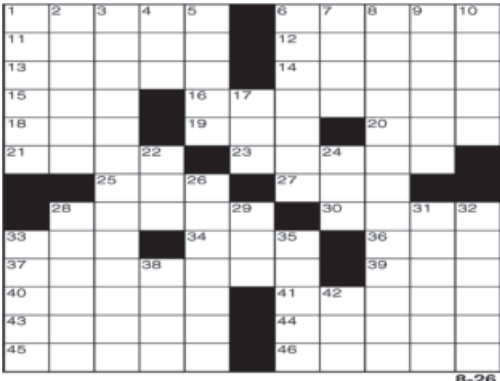
33 High-IQ group

35 Sad sack

38 Skilled


42 Flamenco cry

WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS





Pabna University of Science & Technology

Office of the Project Director, PUST, PABNA.

Memo No: PUST/PD/e-GP/OTM/55

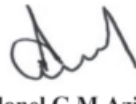
Dated : 16 August, 2023

e-Tender Notice (FY-2023-24)

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the Procurement of following works Under "Pabna University of Science & Technology Development Project", PUST, Pabna.

Sl No	e-Tender ID	APP ID	Package No & Invitation Ref. No	Name of Works	Tender Publication Date & Time	Tender Closing Date & Time	Method
01.	862050	190277	PUST/PD OFFICE/e-GP/2022-23/ LAND DEVELOPMENT	LAND DEVELOPMENT by Supplying earth at PUST, FY 2022-23.	21 August, 2023 13.30	04 Sep, 2023 13.30.00	OTM
02.	862049	190277	PUST/PD OFFICE/e-GP/2022-23/ Sub-Station	Construction 1 (one) Storied 2000 KVA & 1250 KVA Sub-Station Bhuban With its Ancillary Work Additional work at PUST, FY 2022-23.	21 August, 2023 12.00	18 Sep, 2023 12.30.00	OTM
03.	862035	190277	PUST/PD OFFICE/e-GP/2022-24/ Academic Bhuban-2	Construction of 12 Storied Academic Bhuban-2 With 12 Storied Foundation Additional Work i.e (Under Ground Water Reservoir, Fire Protection Work, Internet, Telephone, Gas Connection Work e.t.c Work) at PUST, FY 2023-24.	21 August, 2023 12.00	11 Sep, 2023 13.00.00	OTM
04.	862034	190277	PUST/PD OFFICE/e-GP/2022-23/ Administrative building	Construction of 10 Storied Administrative building with 10 Storied foundation Additional Work i.e (Under Ground Water Reservoir, Fire Protection Work, Internet, Telephone, Interior Decoration Gas Connection Work e.t.c Work) at PUST, FY 2022-23.	21 August, 2023 12.00	11 Sep, 2023 13.00.00	OTM
05.	861349	190277	PUST/PD OFFICE/e-GP/2022-23/ DRAIN	Construction of RCC DRAIN (Additional Work) i.e installation of deep tube well Construction Pump Machine Room & Complete Water Supply Pipe Network e.t.c at PUST, FY 2022-23.	21 August, 2023 11.00	11 Sep, 2023 12.00.00	OTM
06.	862135	190277	PUST/PD OFFICE/e-GP/2022-23/Computer-ICT Eqp/2023-24	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Computer With Accessories and ICT Materials for Pabna University of Science & Technology, Development Project	23 August, 2023 11.00	11 Sep, 2023 12.00.00	OTM

This is an online Tender where only e-tender will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP system portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for downloading the e-Tender Documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered Banks branches. Further information and guideline are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).



Engr. Lt Colonel G.M Azizur Rahman
afwc, psc (Retd)
Project Director
Pabna University of Science & Technology, Development Project.

GD- 1236