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On a Fishing cat, *Felis (Prionailurus) viverrina* Bennett, 1833, from continental Malaysia

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In 1967 the aborigines in Bahau Negeri Sembilan (about 2° 40' N, 102° 36' E) captured a spotted cat about the size of a large domestic cat. The animal was given to the Melaka Zoo where it arrived on 9 June 1967 and where it died on 25 April 1977. Then the cat was mounted and sent to the Wildlife Training Centre at Bukit Rengit, Lancang, Pahang, where it still can be found (see figure).

The specimen had a rather coarse earthy-grey fur with body markings consisting of a series of elongate spots arranged in more or less longitudinal rows. The tail was less than 50 % of the head and body length. The total length of the mounted animal was about 770 mm, the tail length about 280 mm. The general build was rather stocky with comparatively short legs and a rather elongated head.

From the description and the photograph it is evident that the animal is a fishing cat, *Felis (Prionailurus) viverrina* Bennett, 1833. So far, the species has not been mentioned for the fauna of continental Malaysia (see e.g. MEDWAY 1969, 1978; HARRISON 1966) and thus the Bahau Negeri Sembilan specimen is the first one known from the Malay Peninsula.

Is the fishing cat a new faunal element for the Malay Peninsula or has the species always been present in small numbers but has gone unnoticed or are we dealing with escaped specimens kept as pets or in Zoos? These are questions which cannot be answered with certainty.

It is, however, clear that the species has a rather unusual distribution. It occurs with isolated populations in southern India and Sri Lanka. The major distribution is from Nepal through western India and Burma to the northern half of Thailand and Indo-China



Mounted fishing cat, *Felis viverrina* Bennett, 1833, caught in Bahau Negeri Sembilan in 1967

(POCOCK 1939; U TUN YIN 1967; LEKAGUL and MCNEELY 1977; VAN PEENEN 1969). Furthermore, it is found in northern and western Java, Indonesia. It is said to occur also on Sumatra but no museum specimens are known from that island.

The isolated occurrence on Java has been explained as an introduction during the Middle Ages, when there was an important cultural and religious invasion to the islands of Sumatra, Java and Bali from India. A large number of buildings (mostly temples) on the islands are still proof of that invasion. It has been argued that the leopard, *Panthera pardus*, the fishing cat, the black-naped rabbit, *Lepus nigricollis*, and the green peafowl, *Pavo muticus*, were then brought to Java for religious and/or cultural reasons.

Another explanation might be that the species originally had a much larger distribution and that we at present only observe relict populations. In the National Natural History Museum at Leiden, the Netherlands, there is a fishing cat collected by P. DIARD in Singapore in 1819 (BRONGERSMA 1935), and in the Zoological Reference Collection in Singapore there is a mounted fishing cat, said to be collected at Pontianak, Kalimantan (Borneo), Indonesia in 1880. Till now the Leiden and Singapore specimens were thought to be wrongly labeled but it cannot be excluded that they came from (small) populations that exist no longer. Also must be mentioned a fishing cat said to be shot at Megaran, Bali, Indonesia, some time before 1957 (MEISSNER 1958). The remains of the specimen, however, have not been studied by a zoologist, so this remains a doubtful record.

Whatever the correct explanation might be, it is worthwhile to pay attention to the occurrence of fishing cats in the Malay Peninsula and in Indonesia (Borneo and Sumatra).

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Artikel/Article: [On a Fishing cat, Felis \(Prionailurus\) viverrina Bennett, 1833, from continental Malaysia 179-180](#)