

**The Fauna of British India including Ceylon and Burma, Mammalia –
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Prionailurus viverrinus Bennet. The Fishing Cat *Felis viverrinus*, Bennett, Proc. Zoo. Soc. 1883 p 68; and of most recent authors including Jerdon and Blanford
Felis himalayanus, Jardine, Nat. Libr., Feline, p 230, pl 1834
Felis viverriceps, Hodgson, Journ. As. Soc. Beng. v. p.282 1836
Viverriceps benettii, Gray, Proc. Zool. Soc. 1867. p268.

Locality of the type of *viverrinus*, "India" probably the Malabar coast; of Himalayan of *bennettii*, "India"

Distribution: India: precise range unknown; Ceylon, and east of the Bay of Bengal to Cochin China, and Java.

Distinguished in external characteristics from *P. bengalensis* by its much larger size, shorter tail- which is a good deal less than the half length of the head and body- less completely webbed feet, and incompletely sheathed claws, the points of which normally project beyond the hairs of the paws; the coat also is on the average harsher, and the pattern although exhibiting the same general arrangement, is subject to much less variation. The marked differences in the skull between the two species are described below.

The general colour varies from deep olivaceous tawny above and grayish on the flanks to tolerably uniformly yellower tawny or nearly ashy grey, without any bright hue. In the pattern the stripes may be comparatively broad, especially on shoulders or narrow, and the spots on the flanks may be roundish or lineate. The tail is the same tint above as the back spotted at the base and banded distally; the limbs are about the same tint as the flanks, and the pattern extends to the wrist and hook. The underside is white, with heavy pattern forming two collars on the throat and transverse bars behind the fore legs on the chest.

Despite the extensive geographical range of the species, there appear to be no distinguishable local races. Skins resembling each other occur in widely separated areas, and skins from the same districts may differ considerably from one another. For instance the type, probably from the Western Ghats*, is a dark skin with bold pattern, and is indistinguishable from three skins collected near Batavia in Java. Equally dark, but with rather finer pattern, is a skin from Barkot DehraDun 5000ft. (Capt. F.S. Tucker), and one probably from North India (Lord Ripon). But two skins from Nepal (Hodgson), are paler tawnier, one being paler and greyer tawny than the other. One skin from Sehwan, Sind (Capt. Watson), is decidedly tawny rather richer than tawnier of the two from Nepal, but another from Mirpur, Sind (Commander J.P.Walker. R.N.) is pale olivaceous grey, with no tawny tint. Nearest to this comes a skin from Kathalai, E. P. Ceylon (W.W. W. Phillips), which has however a light tawny wash on the back. Another skin from

Kandy (Whyte) is still tawnier, very like the tawny skin from sind. From countries outside British India limits there are two skins from Nhatrang Annam (Dr. Vassll), one matching the tawnier of the Neeplease skins the other being tawnier than the tawny Sind skin but a skin from Cochin China is dark olivaceous tawny like the type and Javan skins.

Of the above mentioned skins only two are dated, the one from Kanthalai, July 30, and the one from Mirpur, Sind Dec. 24. Both are pale, despite the differences in the time of year. Hece there are no data justifying the conclusion that the differences to tint are seasonal. It is noticeable that apart from the type, which like the Javanese skins, has a bold pattern, the skins from British India have on the average, a finer pattern of narrower stripes dorsally and streak like, lineate spots on the flanks.

The only measurements of this species certainly taken in the flesh are those recorded by Phillips from Ceylonese specimens. These however, agree very closely with some dimensions given by Jardine and Hodgson of unsexed Himalayan specimens.

Locality and sex	Head and Body	Tail	Hind Feet
Himalayan (Jardine); ad. ♂	28.5	9.5	-
Nepal (Hodgson); ad ♂	30	10.5	-
Ceylon Phillips largest ; ad ♂	30.5	12.5	7.5
Ceylon Phillips average of 3 ; ad ♂	28.5	11	6.5
Ceylon Phillips average of 3 ad ♀	26	10	5.5

In addition to its larger size, the skull of viverrinus differs from that of bengalensis mainly in characters resulting from the greater development of the masticatory muscels, which has produced a high sagittal crest and a long, narrow, post orbital “waist always narrower than the width of the muzzle above the canines. These differences are naturally particularly well marked in the adult ♂, the skull of which is considerably larger than in the adult ♀

The mastoid width of the ♂ skull from Sind, Ceylon and of the second ♀ skull from Nepal is respectively 60, 65, and 43mm., much less than half the condylobasal length. A similar proportion obtain in all the skulls of the species.

Several additional skulls labeled “ India” and others from Indo China and Java agree, a part from minor details with those entered in the table, and like the skins, bear out the view that the species is not susceptible, on the available evidence of division into local races.

Skull Measurement (in mm) of some British Indian Museum Specimens of *Prionailurus viverrinus*

Locality and Sex	Total Length	Cond Basal Length	Zygomatio width	Post orbital width	Inter orbital width	Maxillary width	Mandibular width	Pm1	m1.
Sehwan, Sind; ad ♂	151	136	96	30	24	38	98	16	11
Nepal; ad ♂	145	133	88	28	18	35	-	15	-
Nepal; ad ♂	140	128	-	31	20	35	-	15.5	-
Kanthalai F.P.; Ceylon ad. ♂	143	129	98	29	23	37	93	15	11
Nepal; ad ♀	128	118	75	27	17 (-)	31	84	14	10
Nepal; ad ♀	123	114	78	30	18	31	81	14	10
Ceylon; ad ♀	-	100+	78	27	18	29	78	14.5	10

Habit: Although occurring occasionally at comparatively high altitudes, eg. 5000ft. at Dehra Dun, this cat is mainly a lowland species partial to “reed-beds” and marshy districts. Hodgson recorded its habitat in Nepal “as the open lowlands of the lower regions” and Jerdon wrote of it as inhabiting the edge of swampy thicket in Purneah”, “marshy regions at the foots of Himalayas”, and the “reed-beds” near Calcutta. This habitat is not restricted to British India, two Javan skins in the British Museum being labeled as killed in “Swamps bordering the coast near Batavi”. The species does not however, appear to be common anywhere; its distribution in India is very important known and there appears of its occurrence in Burma although its existence in that country may be inferred from its being found in Indo China and Java. The popular name “Fishing Cat” reflects the testimony of several observers that it feeds on fish. According to Buchanan Hamilton it even eats hard shelled fresh water mollusks, a gastropod (Ampullaria), and mussel (Unio). The name, nevertheless is some what misleading*. The teeth are not especially adapted in any way of catching fish or for crushing shells of mollusks; they are fitted, as is the whole organization of the species, for preying upon any terrestrial vertebrate animals it can overcome, and there are recorded cases of calves, sheep, dogs, and large snakes being killed by it. It has also known to carry off human babies.

According to Phillips this cat in Ceylon is found sparingly in the jungles all over the islands except, perhaps, in the dry northern zone, Tirripiane, 365ft., near Andrapura, N.C.P., being the most northern point whence it has been recorded. It is usually found in or near the heavier or larger jungles, but may be met with in scrub or in reed-beds and long grass besides rivers and swamps †. It may be seen at any hour of the day and although it can climb well it seldom takes to trees, and feeds mainly on the ground. Phillips confirm the reports of observers in India that the fishing cat puts up a desperate and generally successful fight when tacked by dogs.

Nothing seems to be known about the breeding habits, but there is no reason to suppose they differ from those of other wild cats.

* Specimens I observed in the zoological Gardens, London, shared no greater liking for fish than wild cats of other species.

† The specimen from Kanthalai, sent by Philips to the British Museum, had entered a tank from which it was unable to get out.