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Size matters: a systematic review of five decades (1976–2025) of research on wild felids in Nepal

Rama Mishra
Wild Care Nepal
Babu Ram Lamichhane
baburaml@gmail.com

Wild Care Nepal

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Abstract

Wild felids play key ecological roles as apex predators and mesopredators, yet many species are threatened. Globally, felid research is biased towards large, charismatic species, but how such bias shapes knowledge at the national scale, where conservation decisions are made, is poorly understood. Focusing on Nepal, which hosts 13 felid species (three big and ten small cats), we assessed how research effort was distributed among species, over time, across themes and geographically, and whether it tracked body size. Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, we reviewed peer-reviewed literature published between 1976 and 2025 and indexed in Google Scholar and Scopus. We identified 269 articles in 108 journals. Output was negligible until 2005 but rose sharply thereafter, with over 70% of articles published in 2016–2025; however, small-cat publications declined in the latest five-year period, while big-cat publications continued to increase. The tiger *Panthera tigris*, snow leopard *Panthera uncia* and leopard *Panthera pardus* accounted for over three-quarters of species-level records, and research effort increased with body mass. Big-cat studies addressed biology, conflict, population and habitat, whereas nearly two-thirds of small-cat records were occurrence or distribution notes. Nearly two-thirds of studies were conducted exclusively inside protected areas, although most small cats occur outside them. Nepal's felid knowledge base therefore reflects body size and charisma more than conservation need. We recommend redirecting research effort and funding towards small cats, human-dominated landscapes and ecological themes, and integrating small cats into national monitoring.

Introduction

Wild felids (hereafter 'wild cats') are obligate carnivores that depend almost entirely on animal prey (Sunquist and Sunquist 2002). Positioned at or near the top of food chains, they play an important role in maintaining ecological balance by regulating populations of herbivores and smaller predators (Ripple et al. 2014). Of the 41 recognised wild cat species, 18 are listed as threatened or Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List (five Endangered, ten Vulnerable and three Near Threatened) (Kitchener et al. 2017).

Based on body size, the seven species with an average adult body mass exceeding 30 kg (Jones et al. 2009) are generally referred to as big cats: tiger, lion *Panthera leo*, jaguar *Panthera onca*, leopard, snow leopard, cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* and puma *Puma concolor*. The remaining 34 species are considered small cats. Although all felids are ecologically important, big cats such as the tiger, lion, jaguar and snow leopard are widely regarded as charismatic flagship species and receive a disproportionate share of public attention, conservation funding and research effort (Macdonald et al. 2015).

It is widely assumed that conservation actions targeting large, wide-ranging big cats will also benefit sympatric small cats and their prey, in line with the umbrella species concept (Roberge and Angelstam 2004). However, big cats can exploit a wide range of prey sizes, whereas small cats depend on smaller prey and often on specific microhabitats, such as wetlands, rocky slopes or dense forest understorey, that are not necessarily secured by big-cat conservation. Conservation programmes and funding

allocations show that small cats receive far less attention than big cats from both conservation organisations and governments (Macdonald et al. 2015), leaving them in the shadow of their larger relatives.

Wild cats occupy a wide range of habitats, from sea level to about 6,000 m (Sunquist and Sunquist 2002). Felids have diversified across biogeographic regions, giving rise to distinct regional assemblages, and they occur naturally on all continents except Australia and Antarctica. Their diversity is therefore unevenly distributed and is highest in tropical and subtropical Asia and in Africa. Nepal, located at the junction of the Palaearctic and Indomalayan realms and spanning an elevational gradient from about 60 m to 8,849 m over less than 200 km, has an exceptionally high diversity of wild felids, with 13 species recorded (Amin et al. 2018; Ghimirey et al. 2019; Lamichhane et al. 2023). Three of these are big cats (tiger, leopard and snow leopard) and the remaining ten are small cats. Five species (tiger, snow leopard, clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa*, Eurasian lynx *Lynx lynx* and leopard cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*) are listed as protected species in Schedule 1 of the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973 (Jnawali et al. 2011).

Nepal has a long history of conservation initiatives for charismatic big cats, particularly tigers and snow leopards (Smith et al. 1998; Ale et al. 2016). Nepal's tiger population, for example, increased from an estimated 121 individuals in 2009 to 429 in 2026 (DNPWC and DFSC 2026), and national tiger surveys are now conducted every four years. In contrast, small cats have rarely been the focus of dedicated conservation programmes or research, and four of them are still listed as Data Deficient nationally (Table 1). Conservation efforts for big cats may benefit small cats, but they do not necessarily secure their populations or habitats. The fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus*, a wetland specialist (Mishra et al. 2022), is a typical example: much of its suitable habitat lies outside the tiger-focused protected area network of Nepal (Mishra et al. 2026).

Most small cats in Nepal also occur widely outside protected areas, in forests, farmland, wetlands and rangelands, where they share resources with people and livestock and are exposed to habitat conversion, road traffic, poaching and retaliatory killing. Yet the information needed to assess their status and to design conservation measures, such as data on distribution, abundance, habitat requirements, diet and threats, remains scarce for most species. Globally, research effort on felids is strongly biased towards large-bodied, charismatic species (Brodie 2009; Tensen 2018). However, conservation priorities, legislation and funding decisions are largely made at the national level, and the extent to which such biases shape the knowledge base in a felid-rich country such as Nepal has not been systematically assessed.

Here, we present a systematic review of peer-reviewed studies on wild cats in Nepal published over the past half-century (1976–2025). Specifically, we assessed (1) how research effort was distributed among the 13 felid species and whether it was related to body size, (2) temporal trends in publication output, (3) the thematic focus of studies on big and small cats, and (4) the geographic coverage of research in

relation to the protected area network. We use the findings to identify knowledge gaps and to propose research and conservation priorities for wild cats in Nepal and other felid-rich countries.

Materials and methods

Wild cats in Nepal

Thirteen species of wild felids have been recorded in Nepal, including both the largest (tiger) and the smallest (rusty-spotted cat *Prionailurus rubiginosus*) felids in the world (Table 1). Three of them (tiger, leopard and snow leopard), with an average adult body mass > 30 kg, are categorised as big cats and the remaining ten as small cats. Their global and national conservation status, CITES listing and legal protection under Nepal's National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973 are summarised in Table 1, which also gives the scientific names of all species.

Table 1

Wild felids of Nepal, with average adult body mass, legal protection and conservation status. NPWCA, National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act; P, protected; CITES, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora; IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature; EN, Endangered; VU, Vulnerable; NT, Near Threatened; LC, Least Concern; DD, Data Deficient; N/A, not assessed

SN	Cat species		Body mass (kg)[a]	NPWCA, 1973	CITES Appendix	IUCN Redlist	
	Common name	Scientific name				Global	National
Big Cats							
1	Tiger	*Panthera tigris tigris*	161.91	P	I	EN	EN
2	Leopard	*Panthera pardus fusca*	52.40		I	VU	VU
3	Snow leopard	*Uncia uncia*	32.50	P	I	VU	EN
Small cats							
4	Eurasian lynx	*Lynx lynx*	19.30	P	II	LC	VU
5	Clouded leopard	*Neofelis nebulosa*	14.95	P	I	VU	EN
6	Fishing cat	*Prionailurus viverrinus*	8.83		II	VU	EN
7	Asian golden cat	*Catopuma temminckii*	7.73		I	NT	DD
8	Jungle cat	*Felis chaus*	7.16		II	LC	LC
9	Asiatic wildcat	*Felis lybica ornata*	4.49		II	LC	N/A
10	Pallas's cat	*Otocolobus manul*	3.05		II	NT	DD
11	Marbled cat	*Pardofelis marmorata*	2.83		I	NT	DD
12	Leopard cat	*Prionailurus bengalensis*	2.78	P	II	LC	VU
13	Rusty-spotted cat	*Prionailurus rubiginosus*	1.42		II	VU	DD

[a]Average adult body mass from Jones et al. (2009)

Literature search and screening

We followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al. 2009; Page et al. 2021) to review the scientific literature on wild felids in Nepal. We searched for peer-reviewed articles and book chapters published between 1976 and 2025 in two databases, Google Scholar and Scopus, using the search string “scientific name” OR “common name” AND “Nepal” for each felid species (Table 2). We screened the title, abstract and keywords of each article and excluded articles that did not concern the target species or were not based on data from Nepal. We retained articles on both free-ranging and captive populations. Articles covering more than one species were counted once for each species they covered; the number of species-level records therefore exceeds the number of unique articles (Table 2).

Table 2
Search strings used for each wild felid species and the number of articles retrieved from Google Scholar and Scopus

Cat Species	Keywords used to search peer reviewed articles	Google Scholar		Scopus		Articles used in analysis
		Total results	No. of relevant articles	Total results	No. of relevant articles	
Rusty spotted cat	"Rusty-spotted cat" OR "*Prionailurus rubiginosus*" AND Nepal	236	4	5	0	4
Leopard cat	"Leopard cat" OR "*Prionailurus bengalensis*" AND Nepal	1,020	11	8	5	11
Marbled cat	"Marbled cat" OR "*Pardofelis marmorata*" AND Nepal	422	4	1	1	4
Pallas's cat	"Pallas's cat" OR "Manul" OR "*Otocolobus manul*" AND Nepal	457	6	3	1	6
Asiatic wildcat	"Asiatic wildcat" OR "*Felis lybica*" AND Nepal	81	2	0	0	2
Fishing cat	"Fishing Cat" OR "*Prionailurus viverrinus*" AND Nepal	793	16	8	10	16
Jungle cat	"Jungle cat" OR "*Felis chaus*" AND Nepal	1,400	12	8	6	12
Asiatic golden cat	"Asiatic Golden Cat" OR "*Catopuma temminckii*" AND Nepal	460	5	2	1	5
Eurasian lynx	"Eurasian lynx" OR "*Lynx lynx*" AND Nepal	1,540	4	0	0	4
Clouded leopard	"Clouded Leopard" OR "*Neofelis*	1840	13	8	6	13

[a]The 269 articles analysed comprised 229 single-species articles, 32 articles on two species and eight articles on more than two species. Because these 40 multi-species articles were counted once for each species they covered, the total number of species-level records is 324

Cat Species	Keywords used to search peer reviewed articles	Google Scholar		Scopus		Articles used in analysis
		Total results	No. of relevant articles	Total results	No. of relevant articles	
	nebulosa" AND Nepal					
Snow leopard	"Snow Leopard" OR "*Panthera uncia*" AND Nepal	6,570	77	98	59	77
Leopard	"Common Leopard" OR "*Panthera pardus*" AND Nepal	5,240	66	72	47	66
Tiger	"Tiger" OR "*Panthera tigris*" AND Nepal	24,300	104	255	88	104
Total			**324**		**222**	324[a]

[a]The 269 articles analysed comprised 229 single-species articles, 32 articles on two species and eight articles on more than two species. Because these 40 multi-species articles were counted once for each species they covered, the total number of species-level records is 324

Data extraction and analysis

For each article, we recorded the species studied, journal or book, year of publication, thematic area and geographic coverage. We classified articles into ten thematic areas (Table 3) and grouped geographic coverage into individual protected areas, studies spanning two protected areas, studies conducted exclusively outside protected areas, and national-scale studies. We summarised the number of publications in five-year intervals to assess temporal trends, and tested the relationship between the number of publications and average adult body mass (Jones et al. 2009) using Spearman's rank correlation, for all 13 species and for small cats only. The list of reviewed articles, with online links and abstracts, is provided in Online Resource 1.

Table 3
Thematic areas used to classify studies on wild felids in Nepal, and their key contents

SN	Thematic area	Key contents
1	Occurrence records	Single or multiple occurrence records of a species in specific locations
2	Distribution	Species distribution within the specified areas (protected areas, region, country) including review articles on the species reporting distribution
3	Population	Population status surveys, population modelling, population index
4	Habitat	Habitat assessment, management and modelling
5	Biology	Predator prey relations, diet, movement, habitat preference etc.
6	Genetics	Genetic diversity, population assessment using genetics
7	Cons. & economy	Conservation, tourism, economic assessments, cost-benefit analysis
8	Conflict	Wild cats attack on human and livestock, and persecution by humans
9	Review	Articles based on review of the other scientific articles
10	Threats	Poaching and wildlife trade, retaliation, disease

Results

Publication output and species coverage

We identified 269 articles on the 13 wild felid species of Nepal that met our criteria, comprising 229 single-species articles, 32 articles on two species and eight on more than two species. Of these, 193 were indexed in both Google Scholar and Scopus, and 76 only in Google Scholar. The articles were published in 108 peer-reviewed journals (Online Resource 1), five of which published ten or more articles: Cat News (23), Ecology and Evolution (19), Oryx (18), Journal of Threatened Taxa (12) and PLOS One (10). Over three-quarters (76.16%) of the species-level records concerned the three big cats: tiger, leopard and snow leopard. The tiger was the most studied species (104 articles) and the Asiatic wildcat the least studied (two articles; Fig. 1).

Temporal trends and body size

Few articles on wild felids (3–7 per five-year period) were published between 1976 and 2005. Publication output increased after 2006 and grew rapidly in 2016–2020 and 2021–2025, with more than 70% of species-level records published in these two periods (Fig. 2a). Publications on big cats continued to increase in 2021–2025 (from 70 to 98), whereas those on small cats declined (from 41 to 22). The number of publications increased with felid body mass (Spearman's $r_s = 0.68$, $P = 0.01$, n = 13; Fig. 2b), but not among small cats alone ($r_s = 0.29$, $P = 0.42$, n = 10).

Thematic focus

Biology and conflict were the most frequent themes, and these studies concerned mainly big cats, whereas occurrence records and distribution were the most frequent themes for small cats (Fig. 3).

Geographic coverage

Nearly two-thirds of the studies (63.94%) were carried out exclusively within protected areas, and 24.16% were national in scope (covering areas both inside and outside protected areas). Only 11.90% were carried out exclusively outside protected areas (Table 4). Research covered 17 of Nepal's 21 protected areas; no studies were conducted specifically in Chhayanath, Rara and Banke National Parks or Blackbuck Conservation Area (Fig. 4).

Table 4
Geographic coverage of peer-reviewed articles on wild felids in Nepal published between 1976 and 2025

Geographic coverage of study	Number of research articles			Percentage
	Big	Small	Total	
Annapurna Conservation area	21	7	28	10.41
Api Nampa Conservation Area	1		1	0.37
Bardia National Park	15	1	16	5.95
Chitwan National Park	43	5	48	17.84
Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve	1		1	0.37
Gaurishankar Conservation Area	6	1	7	2.60
Kanchanjungha Conservation Area	8	1	9	3.35
Khaptad National Park	1		1	0.37
Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve		6	6	2.23
Langtang National Park	2		2	0.74
Makalu Barun National Park		2	2	0.74
Manaslu Conservation Area	2		2	0.74
Parsa National Park	5	1	6	2.23
Sagarmatha National Park	10		10	3.72
Shey-Phoksundo National Park	6		6	2.23
Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park	3	1	4	1.49
Shuklaphanta National Park	4	4	8	2.97
Two PAs	14	1	15	5.58
Outside PA	24	8	32	11.90
National	50	15	65	24.16
Grand Total	**216**	**53**	**269**	**100.00**

Discussion

Our review of half a century of peer-reviewed literature shows that research on wild felids in Nepal has grown rapidly but remains highly uneven. Of the 269 articles identified, the three big cats accounted for more than three-quarters of species-level records, whereas the ten small cats together accounted for

less than one quarter. Research on big cats spanned biology, conflict, population, habitat and genetics, whereas most publications on small cats were occurrence records and distribution notes, many of them by-products of surveys designed for big cats or other wildlife. Research was also geographically concentrated within a few protected areas. Together, these patterns indicate that Nepal's felid knowledge base has been shaped more by body size and charisma than by conservation need.

Taxonomic bias: size and charisma

The skew towards big cats in Nepal mirrors global patterns, in which a handful of big cats (tiger, lion, snow leopard, puma and jaguar) dominate both the scientific literature and conservation funding (Macdonald et al. 2015; Tensen 2018). Similar biases have been reported for mammals in general, where large-bodied and widely distributed species attract disproportionate research attention (Clark and May 2002; dos Santos et al. 2020), and for felid research in China (Bao et al. 2010). In Nepal, each big cat species was, on average, the subject of about ten times as many species-level records as each small cat species (82 vs. 8). Although the number of publications increased with body mass across all 13 species, there was no clear relationship among the ten small cats alone. This suggests that the disparity reflects a categorical divide between the flagship big cats and all other felids rather than a gradual effect of body size. Within small cats, research effort appears to be driven more by conservation concern and targeted research and conservation projects than by size: the fishing cat, a globally Vulnerable wetland specialist, was the most studied small cat (16 articles), whereas the Asiatic wildcat, rusty-spotted cat, marbled cat *Pardofelis marmorata* and Eurasian lynx were each covered by four or fewer articles.

Several mutually reinforcing factors probably underlie this bias. First, big cats, especially the tiger and snow leopard, are flagship species that attract international funding, and in developing countries such as Nepal the selection of study species is often influenced by the interests of donor agencies (Pandey et al. 2015). Big cats reportedly receive much more attention and resources compared to small cats (Brodie 2009). Because research and funding are closely linked, this imbalance is likely to be self-perpetuating: without baseline ecological data, small cats are difficult to include in funding proposals and conservation plans. Second, Nepal has institutionalised periodic national tiger surveys and has invested heavily in snow leopard research, generating a steady flow of data and publications on these species (DNPWC and DFSC 2022, 2026). Third, small cats are typically cryptic, often nocturnal and occur at low densities, making them difficult to detect with survey designs optimised for larger species (Anile and Devillard 2016). Camera-trap surveys targeting tigers, leopards or snow leopards nonetheless routinely record small cats as by-catch, which explains the prevalence of occurrence records in the small-cat literature and also represents an under-used source of data.

Temporal trends

The sharp increase in publications after 2006 coincides with the widespread adoption of camera trapping and non-invasive genetic techniques, the launch of periodic national tiger surveys, the growth of open-access and regional journals, and increasing domestic research capacity. Camera trapping in particular led to a series of new national records, including the Pallas's cat *Otocolobus manul* (Shrestha

et al. 2014), the rusty-spotted cat (Lamichhane et al. 2016) and the Asiatic wildcat (Ghimirey et al. 2019; Lamichhane et al. 2023), which raised the number of felid species known from Nepal to 13. However, the trajectories of big and small cats diverged in the most recent period: publications on big cats continued to increase (from 70 in 2016–2020 to 98 in 2021–2025), whereas those on small cats nearly halved (from 41 to 22). Although this may partly reflect incomplete indexing of the most recent publications, it may also indicate that the wave of discovery-driven publications on small cats has not been followed by sustained ecological research.

Thematic gaps

The thematic composition of the literature reveals critical knowledge gaps. Nearly two-thirds of small-cat records concerned occurrence or distribution, and we found few studies on their ecology, such as habitat (one article), population status (two), conflict with people (one) or conservation and economic value (none). A similar emphasis on distribution and habitat, with limited research on biology, genetics and threats, has been reported for the rusty-spotted cat across its range (Bhandari et al. 2026). Such information is fundamental for status assessment: four of Nepal's ten small cats remain Data Deficient in the national Red List, and the national status of the Asiatic wildcat has not been assessed (Table 1). In contrast, biology and conflict were the dominant themes for big cats, reflecting the long history of ecological research on tigers (Smith 1993) and the growing importance of human–wildlife conflict involving tigers and leopards in Nepal (Acharya et al. 2016). Conflict involving small cats, such as depredation of poultry by jungle cats *Felis chaus* and leopard cats and the resulting retaliatory killing, is frequently reported anecdotally but remains unstudied.

Geographic and elevational bias

Research effort was also concentrated geographically. Nearly two-thirds of the studies were conducted exclusively within protected areas, and Chitwan National Park alone accounted for nearly one-fifth of all articles, followed by Annapurna Conservation Area and Bardia National Park. This concentration mirrors the distribution of tigers and snow leopards and of the associated monitoring and research infrastructure, and is consistent with earlier observations that wildlife research in Nepal is concentrated in a few protected areas (Pandey et al. 2015). Protected areas cover about a quarter of Nepal, yet most small cats, as well as a large proportion of the leopard population, occur in human-dominated landscapes outside protected areas, where few studies have been carried out. The fishing cat, for example, occurs in unprotected wetlands and agricultural landscapes of the Terai (Mishra et al. 2022), and forest-dwelling species such as the clouded leopard, marbled cat and Asiatic golden cat *Catopuma temminckii* are distributed across the mid-hills and eastern Himalaya, where research has been sparse. Even big cats use multiple-use landscapes shared with people (Carter et al. 2012; Lamichhane et al. 2019). The current research base is therefore poorly matched to the areas where conservation risk is likely to be highest.

A similar bias is evident along the elevation gradient. Research at high elevations was dominated by the snow leopard (77 articles), whereas the other high-mountain felids, the Eurasian lynx and Pallas's cat,

were covered by only four and six articles, respectively, mostly occurrence records. The cultural and religious tolerance of snow leopards and tigers in parts of Nepal (Ale et al. 2014; Upadhyaya et al. 2020), together with their flagship status, has probably contributed to their favourable research and conservation profile. The leopard, by contrast, lacks similar cultural buffering, is frequently involved in conflict with people and has increasingly been studied in that context (Poudel et al. 2023).

Implications for research and conservation

For big cats, the accumulated evidence provides a reasonable basis for management. Measures proposed to reduce human–felid conflict include livestock insurance, predator-proof corrals, alternative livelihoods for local communities and conservation outreach (Aryal et al. 2014), alongside landscape-level conservation of corridors to maintain viable metapopulations (Shrestha and Kindlmann 2020). Continued research on big cats remains important, particularly on leopards in human-dominated landscapes where conflict is escalating (Kandel et al. 2020; Shrestha et al. 2025).

For small cats, the priority is to move beyond presence records towards purpose-designed ecological research. We suggest that future efforts should (1) systematically compile and analyse small-cat by-catch from existing tiger, leopard and snow leopard camera-trap surveys, which could rapidly yield occupancy and activity data at a national scale; (2) conduct targeted surveys outside protected areas, particularly in wetlands, the Chure range, the mid-hills and the eastern Himalaya; (3) investigate habitat use, diet, population status, genetics and threats, including poultry-related conflict, road mortality and illegal trade; and (4) incorporate small cats into national monitoring programmes and Red List reassessments (Dickman et al. 2015). Because small cats are mesocarnivores that can influence populations of rodents, birds and other prey, and thereby ecological processes (Roemer et al. 2009), their neglect may have consequences for ecosystem functioning. Legal protection is also uneven: the fishing cat, which is nationally Endangered and globally Vulnerable, is not listed as a protected species under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1973 (Table 1). Dedicated funding for small cats will be essential to address these gaps.

The patterns we found in Nepal are likely to apply more widely. Many biodiversity-rich countries in South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America host felid assemblages dominated numerically by small cats, while research capacity and funding are limited and often directed by international donors towards flagship species (Brodie 2009; Macdonald et al. 2015). National-scale syntheses such as ours can reveal mismatches between research effort and conservation need that are masked in global analyses, and we encourage similar reviews in other felid-rich countries to guide the allocation of limited research resources.

Limitations

Our review has some limitations. We restricted our search to peer-reviewed articles indexed in Google Scholar and Scopus and did not include grey literature such as theses, government and NGO reports, or articles published in Nepali, which may disproportionately cover small cats and areas outside protected areas. Our counts should therefore be interpreted as a minimum estimate of research effort, particularly

for the least-studied species. In addition, publications from 2025 may not have been fully indexed at the time of our search, and multi-species articles were counted for each species covered, so species-level records exceed the number of unique articles. Nevertheless, these limitations are unlikely to change the overall pattern of strong taxonomic, thematic and geographic bias revealed by our review.

Conclusions

Research on wild cats in Nepal has expanded rapidly over the past two decades, but it has been concentrated on three charismatic big cats (tiger, snow leopard and leopard), on a few themes and in a few protected areas. For most of Nepal's ten small cats, knowledge remains limited to occurrence records and basic distribution information. Ecological knowledge on their habitat, diet, population status, genetics and threats, both inside and outside protected areas, is lacking, making it difficult to assess their conservation status reliably or to develop practical conservation action plans. The assumption that conservation of big cats will automatically safeguard their smaller relatives remains largely untested and, for habitat specialists such as the fishing cat, appears unlikely to hold. Deliberately redirecting research effort and funding towards small cats, human-dominated landscapes and ecological themes, together with efforts to curb illegal hunting and trade, reduce conflict and retaliatory killing, and raise public awareness, will be essential to secure the long-term future of Nepal's entire felid assemblage.

Declarations

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Competing interests

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Ethics approval

Not applicable. This study is a review of published literature and did not involve animals or human participants.

Data availability

The list of articles included in this review, with study themes and online links, is provided in Online Resource 1.

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Figures

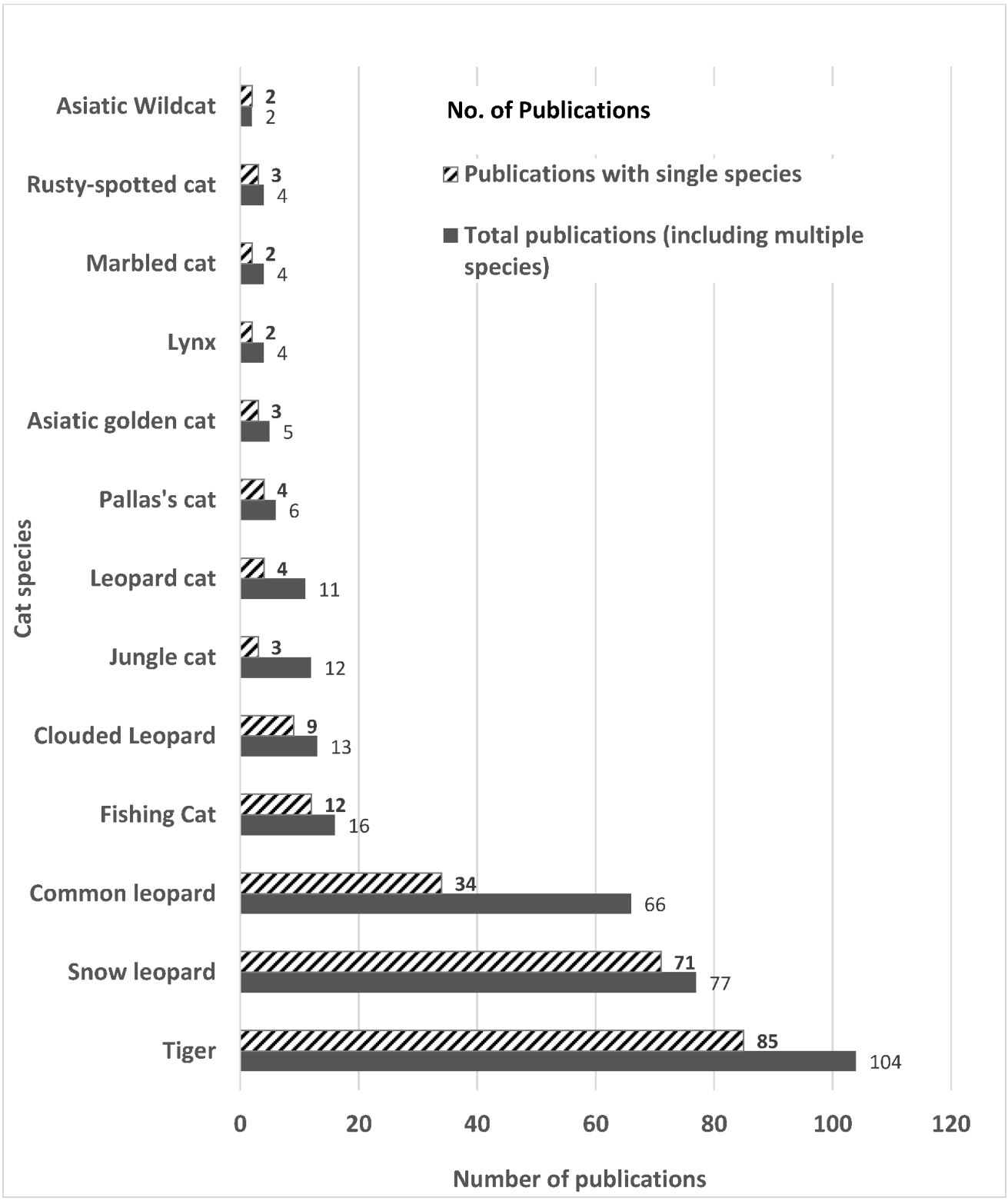
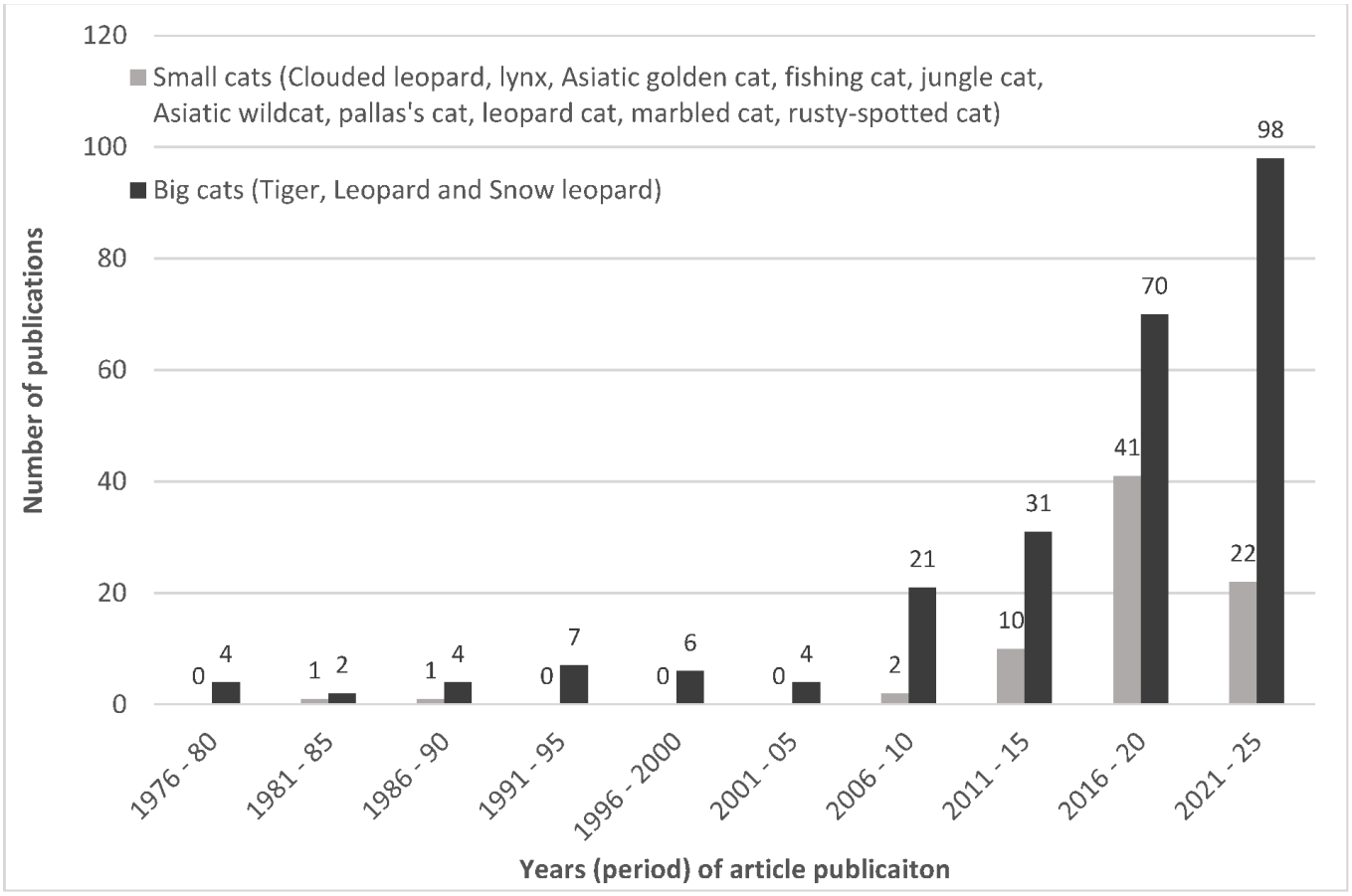
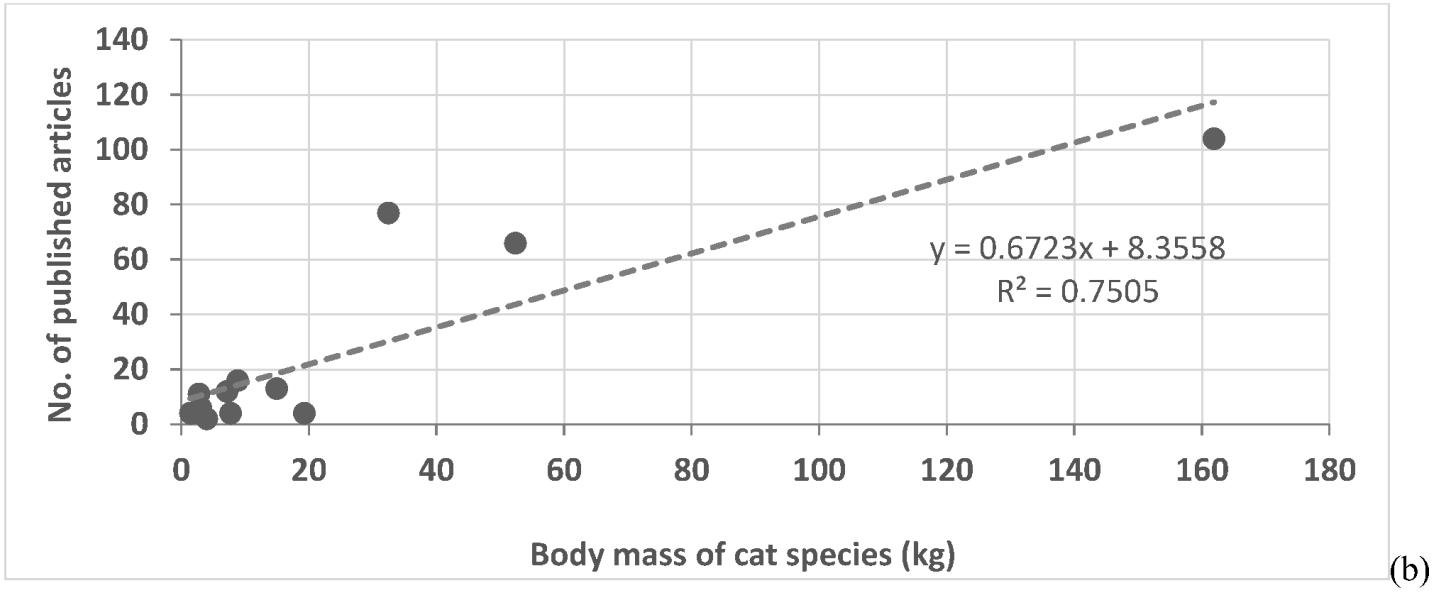


Figure 1

Number of peer-reviewed articles on each wild felid species in Nepal published between 1976 and 2025, including and excluding multi-species articles



(a)



(b)

Figure 2

(**a**) Number of peer-reviewed articles on big and small wild cats in Nepal in five-year intervals between 1976 and 2025; (**b**) number of articles on each species in relation to its average adult body mass

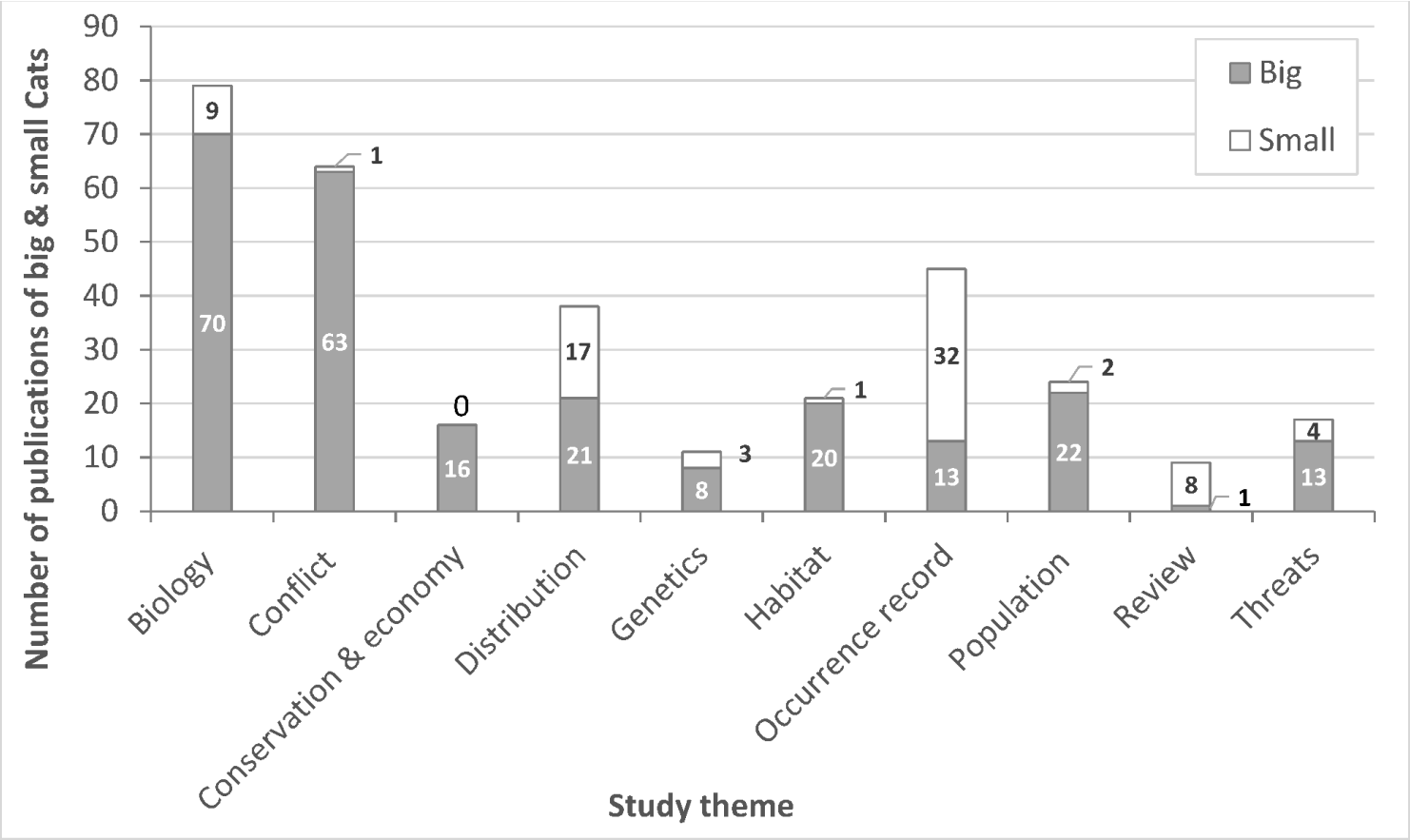


Figure 3

Number of articles on big and small wild cats in Nepal in each thematic area

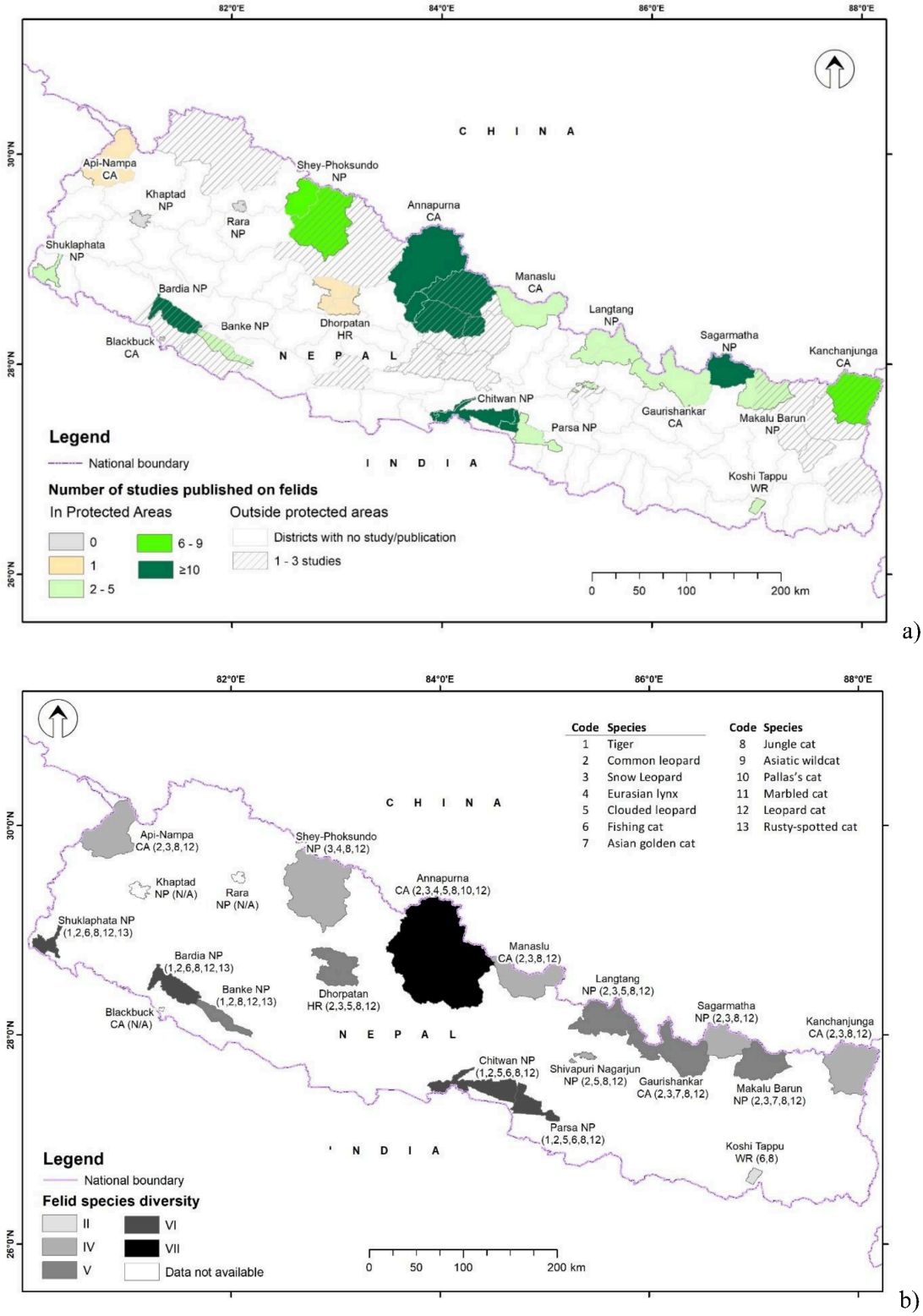


Figure 4

(**a**) Geographic coverage of peer-reviewed articles on wild felids in Nepal (1976–2025) and (**b**) felid species richness in protected areas of Nepal

Supplementary Files

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