



Jaguarundi (*Puma yagouarundi*)



Also known as:	eyra cat, jaguarondi, otter cat
Synonyms:	<i>Felis yagouarundi</i> , <i>Herpailurus yagouarundi</i> , <i>Herpailurus jaguarondi</i>
Spanish:	Gato Colorado, Gato Moro, León Brenero, Leoncillo, Onza, Yaguarundi
Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Chordata
Class	Mammalia
Order	Carnivora
Family	Felidae
Genus	<i>Puma</i> (1)
Size	Head-body length: 50 - 77 cm (2) (3) Tail length: 33 - 61 cm (2) (4)
Weight	4.5 - 9 kg (2) (3)

STATUS

The jaguarundi is classified as Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List (1) and listed on Appendix I and Appendix II of CITES (5).

DESCRIPTION

The jaguarundi (*Puma yagouarundi*) is one of the most unusual of the New World cat species, being somewhat weasel-like in appearance. The body is long and slender, with short legs, a small, flattened head, short, rounded ears, and a long tail. Unlike many other small South American cats, the coat lacks spots, but the jaguarundi is probably the most variable in colour of all wild cats (2) (3) (4) (6). The species occurs in two main colour **morphs**: a dark **morph**, which is uniform black, brownish or grey in colour, sometimes slightly lighter on the underparts, and a paler red **morph**, which may vary from tawny yellow to bright chestnut red (2) (3) (6). Individual hairs tend to be lighter on the base and the tip, giving some individuals a grizzled appearance (7). The red **morph** was once considered a separate species, *Felis eyra*, but it is now known that individuals of both colours can occur in the same population and even in the same litter (6) (7) (8). In general, the dark **morph** is believed to be more common in rainforest habitats, and the paler **morph** in drier environments (2) (8), although both **morphs** can be found in both environments (9).

Owing to its weasel-like appearance, the dark **morph** jaguarundi is often mistaken for the tayra (*Eira barbara*), a large **mustelid**, but can be distinguished by the absence of the tayra's yellowish throat spot (2) (6) (7), and by having a very long, slender tail with very short hair (9). The jaguarundi is quite a vocal cat, with at least 13 distinct calls recorded, including a purr, whistle, scream, chatter, yap, and a bird-like "chirp" (6) (7).

RANGE

The jaguarundi has a wide distribution across North, Central and South America, from southern Texas in the United States, south as far as northern Argentina (1) (2) (6) (7). It has also been reported from

Arizona (4) (7), but its status here remains unclear (7) (10), and the species may in fact now be extinct in the United States (1).

HABITAT

The jaguarundi inhabits a broad range of both open and closed habitats, including rainforest, swamp and savanna woodland, savanna, thickets, and semi-arid thorn scrub. It may also occur in **secondary vegetation** and disturbed areas, but is thought to prefer areas with at least some dense ground cover (2) (6) (7) (8). A mainly lowland species, the jaguarundi can be found at elevations of up to 2,000 metres, though may occur at up to 3,200 metres in some areas (6) (7) (8).

BIOLOGY

In addition to its unique appearance, the jaguarundi differs from other small New World cats in many aspects of its biology and behaviour. Individuals may travel widely in unusually large **home ranges** and are more terrestrial than many other species, though are also agile climbers (2) (3) (6) (7). The jaguarundi is also much more **diurnal** than most cats (3) (11) (12). The diet consists mainly of small mammals, birds and reptiles, as well as occasional amphibians, fish and larger mammals (2) (3) (4) (6). The jaguarundi has been observed to jump up to two metres off the ground to swat at birds in the air (6).

The breeding behaviour of the jaguarundi is less well known (6). It is believed to live either alone or in pairs (2) (3) (7), and may breed year-round in the tropics, although one or two distinct breeding seasons have been suggested for northern parts of the range (3) (7). The female gives birth to between one and four young after a **gestation** period of 70 to 75 days (3) (6) (8). The young are born in a den, typically located in a dense thicket, hollow tree, fallen log, or thick grassy clump (6) (7). Like the adult, the young usually lack spots (2) (6). Young jaguarundis leave the den after about 28 days, reaching sexual maturity at around two to three years, and living for up to 15 years (3) (7) (8).

THREATS

The largely **diurnal** behaviour and open habitats of the jaguarundi mean that it is often the most commonly seen cat within its range, leading to the mistaken belief that it is relatively abundant. Now believed to be much less common than previously thought, the species is undergoing a decline, largely as a result of habitat loss and fragmentation as savannas are converted for large-scale agriculture and pasture (1). Although more flexible in its habitat requirements than many other small cat species, and not commercially exploited for its pelt, the jaguarundi is a notorious predator on domestic poultry, and killing of jaguarundis to protect poultry is considered to have a major impact on its population (1) (6) (7) (8). It may also be caught in traps set for other, commercially valuable species (1) (8), and is thought to suffer from competition with the larger ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*) (1).

CONSERVATION

The IUCN recommend that the status of the jaguarundi is regularly reviewed, as it may be more threatened than currently believed (1). The species is protected across most of its range, with hunting illegal in many countries (1) (8), and international trade is monitored and controlled under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) (5). North and Central American populations are particularly at risk, with the jaguarundi now very rare or possibly even extinct in the USA, and also in Uruguay (8). The tighter CITES listing of the northern populations, on Appendix I, reflects the more threatened status (5). Jaguarundi numbers are expected to be relatively low even in protected areas, and further study into the species' ecology, biology and conservation status has been recommended in order to help protect this unusual cat (1).

FIND OUT MORE

Find out more about the jaguarundi and about the conservation of wild cat species:

- IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group:
<http://www.catsg.org/>

AUTHENTICATION

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GLOSSARY

- **Diurnal:** active during the day.
- **Gestation:** the state of being pregnant; the period from conception to birth.
- **Home range:** the area occupied by an animal during routine activities, which is not actively defended.
- **Morph:** one of two or more distinct types of a given species, often distinct colour forms, which occur in the same population at the same time (that is, are not geographical or seasonal variations).
- **Mustelid:** a family of carnivores with short, stocky legs, an elongated body and long, sharp canine teeth. Includes otters, weasels, ferrets and badgers.
- **Secondary vegetation:** vegetation that has re-grown after a major disturbance, such as fire or clearance.

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