



Jungle cat (*Felis chaus*)



Also known as: Reed cat, swamp cat

French: CHAT DE JUNGLE, CHAT DES MARAIS
Spanish: Gato De La Jungla, Gato De Los Pantanos

Kingdom Animalia
Phylum Chordata
Class Mammalia
Order Carnivora
Family Felidae
Genus *Felis* (1)
Size Head-body length: 60 - 75 cm (2)
 Tail length: 25 - 35 cm (2)
Weight 7 - 13.5 kg (2)

STATUS

The jungle cat is classified as Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List (1) and listed on Appendix II of CITES (3).

DESCRIPTION

The jungle cat (*Felis chaus*) is a large, slender wild cat (4), with long legs and long, close-set, rounded ears which have characteristic small black tufts of hair on the tips (5). It has a long, slim face with a white muzzle and distinctive white markings above and below the eyes, as well as dark spots in front of the eyes, near the nose (5).

The reddish, sandy-brown or tawny-grey coat of the jungle cat is usually plain, without any spots or patterns. However, the ends of the black **guard hairs** give this species a somewhat speckled appearance along its back. The jungle cat may also have several stripes on its legs. The throat is pale cream (5), with occasional dark or light stripes (4), and the stomach is lighter than the rest of the body (5). There are a number of narrow black rings near the tip of the tail. The tail of a jungle cat is smaller than that of a domestic cat, measuring about a third of its head and body length (5).

Young jungle cats are patterned with stripes and spotted markings from birth, which remain until they are sexually mature (5). The adult jungle cat may sometimes retain some of these markings, usually as spots or dark stripes on the forelimbs and hind limbs (4) (5).

Despite its common name, the jungle cat actually occurs in wetland and **riparian** habitats where there is dense reed vegetation, perhaps making this species' alternative names of 'swamp cat' or 'reed cat' more appropriate (6).

RANGE

Although the jungle cat has an extremely large range, it has a rather sparse and patchy distribution. The jungle cat is most abundant in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It occurs in Africa, where it is found only

in Egypt, and across southwest Asia, Central Asia and Southeast Asia, where its range extends as far as southern China (1).

HABITAT

The jungle cat is usually found in wetlands and swamps, as well as on flood plains and in dense coastal vegetation at relatively low altitudes (5). It occurs up to elevations of 2,400 metres in the Himalayan foothills (1).

Although this species is almost always associated with water and dense vegetation, the jungle cat may be found in a wide variety of other habitats types, including deserts, where it occurs along riverbeds and near oases, and in grassland, woodland and dry **deciduous forests** (1) (4) (6).

BIOLOGY

Unlike many other species of wild cat, the jungle cat is not **nocturnal**, instead doing much of its hunting during the early morning and late afternoon (5). The jungle cat stalks and ambushes its prey on the ground, primarily eating small rodents such as rats, mice and gerbils. The jungle cat may sometimes jump to catch birds, such as pheasants, ducks and sparrows (5). Other prey species are hunted more opportunistically, including fish, snakes, hares, lizards and amphibians (7). This species is also known to occasionally scavenge the scraps of lion kills (1).

Scent marking, such as urine spraying and rubbing scent against objects, is used by the male jungle cat to determine its **territory**. The male's **home range** typically overlaps the range of several females, although the jungle cat is generally a solitary animal, only socialising with other individuals during the breeding season (5).

The female jungle cat reaches sexual maturity at around 11 months old. Most young are born between December and June, after a **gestation** period of 63 to 66 days, although the timing of breeding varies depending on location. Usually, a litter of two or three kittens is produced, but as many as six kittens can be born in the same litter (4). The female jungle cat may have up to two litters a year (7). The female gives birth to the kittens in a den, which is usually located in well concealed, densely vegetated areas, such as in paddy fields, hollow trees, reed beds and among tree roots (5).

The young are born blind, not opening their eyes until they reach 10 to 13 days old (5). The kittens suckle milk from the female for a further 90 days, and become completely weaned at around 102 days old. The young jungle cats become fully independent at eight to nine months old (7). The average life span for the jungle cat in the wild is 14 years old, and around 9 years old in captivity (8).

THREATS

The jungle cat is threatened by habitat loss and human persecution. Though the jungle cat has adapted well to irrigated and cultivated farmland and artificial wetlands, conversion of the jungle cat's natural habitat has reduced prey numbers. This has led to the highly adaptable jungle cat feeding on livestock in the absence of its natural prey, thereby bringing it into conflict with landowners (1) (5). As a result, the jungle cat is often targeted by traps, snares and poisons (1) put down by farmers, which see it as a pest and a risk to their livelihoods (6).

A threat to this species from the fur trade also exists. Large numbers of jungle cat skins used to be exported from India, but this practice has since been made illegal (5). Unfortunately illegal trading still occurs in India, Egypt and Afghanistan (1).

CONSERVATION

Although much more research is required to obtain a better picture of jungle cat population trends (5), this species is considered to be in decline in many areas, particularly in southeast and southwest Asia (1).

The jungle cat is listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which means that annual export quotas are set and trade is closely monitored (1) (3). The jungle cat is also protected from hunting in certain states in India, and in 2009 it was placed on Afghanistan's Protected Species List, which protects this species from being hunted and traded (1).

Recommended conservation measures for the jungle cat include work to halt poisoning and trapping, as well as encouraging farmers to better protect their domestic birds to prevent conflict. This species would also benefit from improved protection of natural wetlands and reed beds, particularly in the more arid parts of its range. Better legislation for the fur trade would also be welcomed, to stop the trading in the fur of this species (1).

FIND OUT MORE

For further information on the jungle cat, other cat species and their conservation:

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

AUTHENTICATION

This information is awaiting authentication by a species expert, and will be updated as soon as possible. If you are able to help please contact:

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GLOSSARY

- **Deciduous forest:** forest consisting mainly of deciduous trees, which shed their leaves at the end of the growing season.
- **Gestation:** the state of being pregnant; the period from conception to birth.

- **Guard hairs:** in some mammals, long, coarse hairs that protect the softer layer of fur below.
- **Home range:** the area occupied by an animal during routine activities, which is not actively defended.
- **Nocturnal:** active at night.
- **Riparian:** relating to the banks of rivers and streams.
- **Territory:** an area occupied and defended by an animal, a pair of animals or a group.

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<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>
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