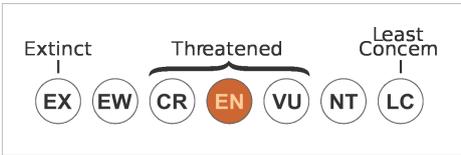


# Andean Mountain Cat

Andean Mountain Cat <sup>[1]</sup>	
	
Conservation status	
	
Endangered (IUCN 3.1) <sup>[2]</sup>	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Genus:	<i>Leopardus</i>
Species:	<i>L. jacobita</i>
Binomial name	
<p><i>Leopardus jacobita</i> (Cornalia, 1865)</p>	
	
Geographic range	
Synonyms	
<i>Leopardus jacobitus</i>	

The **Andean Mountain Cat** (*Leopardus jacobita*) is a small wild cat.<sup>[2]</sup> It is one of only two felids for which no subspecies have been classically described.<sup>[3]</sup> Fewer than 2500 individuals are thought to exist.<sup>[4]</sup> This cat is one of

about two dozen small wild cat species found around the world. In comparison to their larger cousins which may have millions of dollars dedicated to conservation efforts, conservation efforts exist on budgets in the thousands for small wild felids like the Andean Mountain Cat.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Description

Its habitat and appearance make it the small cat analog of the Snow Leopard, in that it lives around 3500–4800 m (11500–15700 ft) - well above the tree line - and only where there is water to support it. While it is about the size of a domestic cat, it appears larger because of its long tail and thick fur. Like snow leopards, the coat of an Andean mountain cat is silvery-grey in color, with a white underside and numerous dark spots and stripes. There are black rings around the tail and limbs.<sup>[6]</sup>

The body length ranges from 57 to 64 centimetres (22 to 25 in), the tail length is 41 to 48 cm (16 to 19 in), the shoulder height is about 36 cm (14 in) and the body weight is 5.5 kilograms (12 lb).

## Distribution and habitat

It is one of the least known and rarest of all felines; almost all that is known about it comes from a few observations in the wild and from skins. There are none in captivity. It is believed to live only in the high Andes mountains of Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina.<sup>[7]</sup>

There has been a substantial increase in research effort on the Andean Mountain Cat since Nowell and Jackson wrote that "it is not clear whether [its] apparent rarity is a natural phenomenon, is attributable to human actions, or is simply a misperception resulting from lack of observations."<sup>[3]</sup> Surveys since then have confirmed that the Andean cat is a rare species, occurring at lower densities in the same high-altitude environment as its close cousin, the Pampas Cat *Leopardus colocolo*.<sup>[8]</sup> Across its range, it has a very low level of genetic diversity.<sup>[2] [9]</sup>

The Andean Mountain Cat's preferred high-elevation montane habitat is fragmented by deep valleys, and its distribution is likely to be further localized by the patchy nature of colonies of its preferred prey, mountain viscachas (*Lagidium* spp). The total effective population size ( $N_e$ ) could be below 2,500 mature individuals, with a declining trend due to loss of prey base and habitat, as well as to persecution and hunting for traditional ceremonial purposes, and no subpopulation having an effective population size larger than 250 mature individuals.<sup>[10]</sup>

While the Andean Mountain Cat's main prey likely is the mountain viscacha, it is also probable that mountain chinchillas were previously important prey of the Andean Mountain Cat, before their populations were drastically reduced due to hunting for the fur trade.<sup>[11]</sup> Since it lives only in the high mountains, human-inhabited valleys act as barriers, fragmenting the population, meaning that even low levels of poaching could be devastating. It is often killed in Chile and Bolivia because of local superstition.

## Research



Andean Mountain Cat

Prior to 1998, the only evidence of this cat's existence was two photographs. It was then that Jim Sanderson took up his quest to find the Andean Mountain Cat.<sup>[12]</sup> <sup>[13]</sup> Sanderson sighted and photographed one in Chile, in 1998, near Chile's northern border with Peru. In 2004, he joined a Bolivian research team and helped radio-collar an Andean cat in Bolivia. In April 2005, this cat was found dead, perhaps after being caught in a poacher's trap.<sup>[14]</sup>

Sanderson is still heavily involved with the Andean Cat. With coworkers Constanza Napolitano, Lilian Villalba, and Eliseo Delgado and many others in the Andean Cat Alliance, the Small Cat Conservation Alliance (SCCA)<sup>[15]</sup> has forged conservation agreements

with Fundación Biodiversitas, a Chilean non-profit organization, and CONAF, the government agency responsible for managing national parks and production forests. CONAF has agreed to allow the SCCA to renovate a building for the Andean Cat Conservation and Monitoring Center<sup>[16]</sup> on their already functioning compound at San Pedro de Atacama in Chile.

Villalba of the Andean Cat Alliance conducted a major research program, including radio-telemetry studies, from 2001 to 2006 in the Khastor region of southern Bolivia.<sup>[17]</sup>

Conservation efforts are also being made by the Feline Conservation Federation to preserve this species.

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**External links**

- Andean Cat Alliance (<http://www.gatoandino.org>) or the Alianza Gato Andino (AGA). Available in Spanish and English.
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