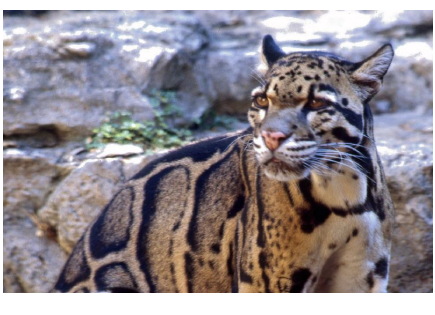
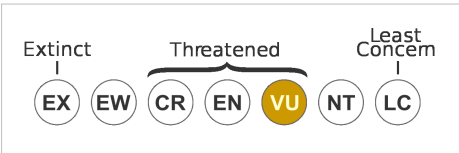
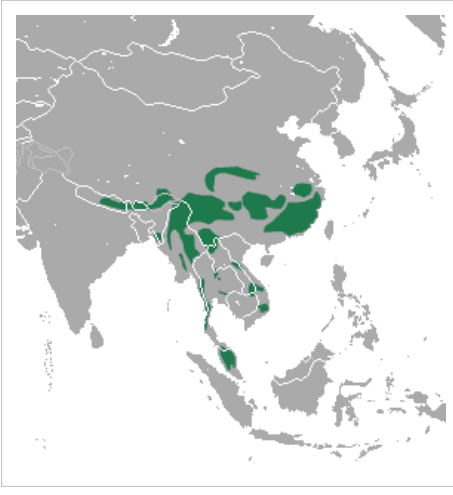


Clouded leopard

Clouded leopard ^[1]	
	
Conservation status	
 <p style="text-align: center;">Vulnerable (IUCN 3.1)^[2]</p>	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Subfamily:	Pantherinae
Genus:	<i>Neofelis</i>
Species:	<i>N. nebulosa</i>
Binomial name	
<i>Neofelis nebulosa</i> (Griffith, 1821)	


Clouded leopard range
Synonyms
<i>Felis macrocelis</i> <i>Felis marmota</i>

The **clouded leopard** (*Neofelis nebulosa*) is a felid found from the Himalayan foothills through mainland Southeast Asia into China, and has been classified as vulnerable in 2008 by IUCN. Its total population size is suspected to be fewer than 10,000 mature individuals, with a decreasing population trend and no single population numbering more than 1,000 adults.^[2]

Characteristics



Close up of face

Clouded leopards have a tan or tawny coat, and are distinctively marked with large, irregularly-shaped, dark-edged ellipses which are said to be shaped like clouds. This unique appearance gave the cat both its common and scientific species name—*nebulosus* is Latin for "cloudy". The clouded leopard was confusing to scientists for a long time because of its appearance and skeleton. It seemed to be a cross between a big cat and a small cat.

The average clouded leopard typically weighs between 15 and 23 kilograms (33 and 51 lb), and has a shoulder height of 25 to 40 centimetres (9.8 to 16 in).^[3] Females have a head-body length varying from 68 to 94 centimetres (27 to 37 in), with a 61 to 82 centimetres (24 to 32 in) tail, while the males are larger at 81 to 108 centimetres (32 to 43 in) with a 74 to 91 centimetres (29 to 36 in) tail.^[4] Clouded leopards have a heavy build and, proportionately, the longest canine teeth of any living felid—of 2 inches (5.1 cm), about the same as a tiger's.^[5] These characteristics led early researchers to speculate that they preyed on large land-dwelling mammals.

The background color of clouded leopard fur ranges from yellow-brown to dark grey, with paler underparts. The sides and back of the animal are marked with numerous dark cloud-like blotches, which may be partly outlined in black. There are black spots on the head, underparts, and legs, and short black stripes on the neck; the backs of the ears are also black, and there are black rings on the tail. A few melanistic clouded leopards have been reported from Borneo, but this color phase is uncommon.^[4]

As might be expected from the fact some of its prey lives in trees, the clouded leopard is an excellent climber. Short, flexible legs, large paws, and sharp claws combine to make it very sure-footed in the canopy. The clouded leopard's

tail can be as long as its body, further aiding in balance, giving it a squirrel-like agility similar to the margay of South America. Surprisingly, this arboreal creature can climb while hanging upside-down under branches, and descend tree trunks head-first.^[3] In captivity, the clouded leopard routinely hangs by its hind legs using its long tail for balance, and runs head-first down tree trunks. Little is known about its behavior in the wild, but it is assumed from this behavior that a favored hunting tactic is to drop on prey from the trees.

Distribution and habitat

Clouded leopard are only found in Southeast Asia, ranging from Nepal, northeast India, Bangladesh and the eastern Himalayas through southern China as far north as Wuyi Shan, to western Malaysia and Indochina.^[4] In Assam, clouded leopards have been observed in forests but have not been recorded in protected areas.^[6] They occur in northern West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.^{[7][8]}

Clouded leopards prefer closed forest.^[9] They live in tropical and subtropical forests at altitudes of up to about 2000 m (6600 ft). They are sometimes found in mangrove swamps and grassland. Clouded leopard live in temperatures from 18 to 49 °C (64 to 120 °F).

Distribution of subspecies

At present, the following three subspecies are recognized.^[10]

- *Neofelis nebulosa nebulosa* (Griffith, 1821): lives in Southern China to eastern Myanmar;
- *Neofelis nebulosa macrosceloides* (Hodgson, 1853): lives in Nepal to Myanmar;
- *Neofelis nebulosa brachyura* (Swinhoe, 1862): used to live in Taiwan, and is considered extinct. The last confirmed sighting was in 1989, when the skin from a small individual was found in the Taroko area.^[11]

The Sunda clouded leopard (*Neofelis diardi*) found on Sumatra and Borneo is genetically distinct and considered a separate species.^[2]

Ecology and behavior

Because of the animal's reclusive nature, the behavior of the clouded leopard in the wild is little known. With no evidence for a pack or pride society like that of the lion, it is assumed that it is a generally solitary creature, and it appears to be primarily nocturnal. Clouded leopards are largely arboreal, hunting prey in the trees, and also using trees to rest during the day. However, they spend a significant proportion of their time on the ground, and sometimes inhabit environments without tall trees.^[4]

Clouded leopards have been observed to scent mark in captivity, for example by urine spraying and head-rubbing on prominent objects. Presumably such habits are used to mark their territory in the wild, although the size of their home ranges is unknown. Like other big cats, they do not appear able to purr, but they otherwise have a wide range of vocalisations, including mewling, hissing, growling, moaning, and snorting.^[4]

Though remarkably little is known about the natural history and behavioral habits of this species in the wild, it is now thought that its primary prey includes both arboreal and terrestrial mammals, particularly deer, supplemented by similarly sized prey such as monkeys, civets, birds, porcupines, and domestic livestock.^[4] Clouded leopards that are held in captivity also eat eggs and some vegetation.



A clouded leopard at the Feline Conservation Center, Rosamond, California

Reproduction

Females give birth to a litter of two to four cubs after a gestation period of about 85 to 93 days.^[3] Initially, the young are blind and helpless, much like the young of many other cats, and weigh from 140 to 280 grams (4.9 to 9.9 oz). Unlike adults, the kittens' spots are "solid"—completely dark rather than dark rings. The young can see within about 10 days of birth, are active within five weeks, and are fully weaned at around three month of age.^[4]

Clouded leopards attain the adult coat pattern at around six months, and probably become independent after around ten months. They reach sexual maturity at two years of age, and females are able to bear one litter each year.^[4] Adults in captivity have lived as long as 17 years.^[12] In the wild, they have an average 11 year lifespan.

Threats

Many of the remaining forest areas are too small to ensure the long-term persistence of clouded leopard populations.^[13] They are threatened by habitat loss following large-scale deforestation and commercial poaching for the wildlife trade. Skins, claws and teeth are offered for decoration and clothing, bones and meat as substitute for tiger in traditional Asian medicines and tonics, and live animals for the pet trade. Few poaching incidents have been documented, but all range states are believed to have some degree of commercial poaching. In recent years, substantial domestic markets existed in Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam.^{[14][15]}

In Myanmar, 301 body parts of at least 279 clouded leopards, mostly skins and skeletons, were observed in four markets surveyed between 1991 to 2006. Three of the surveyed markets are situated on international borders with China and Thailand, and cater to international buyers, although clouded leopards are completely protected under Myanmar's national legislation. Effective implementation and enforcement of CITES is considered inadequate.^[16]

Conservation



A clouded leopard resting atop a tree trunk at the Toronto Zoo.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora included the clouded leopard in the Appendix I. Over most of their range, they are protected by national legislation. Hunting is banned in Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Hunting regulations apply in Lao PDR.^[2]

Only seven clouded leopards have ever been radio collared and their territorial movements monitored and recorded. Most of these cats were studied in Thailand and Nepal. Other available information on their ecology is anecdotal, based on local interviews and a few sighting reports, or stems from captive animals.^[13] Very little is known of their

natural history, ecology and behavior in the wild throughout their range, because due to their largely arboreal and nocturnal habits they are difficult to study.

The United States also lists the clouded leopard under the Endangered Species Act, further prohibiting trade in the animals or any parts or products made from them in the United States. These bans, however, are poorly enforced.^[1]

In captivity

Early captive breeding programs involving clouded leopards were met with little success, largely due to ignorance of courtship activity among these cats in the wild. Experience has taught keepers that introducing pairs of clouded leopards at a young age gives opportunities for the pair to bond and breed successfully. Introducing pairs as older adults may cause the animals such stress that the male may kill the female.^[3] Modern breeding programs involve carefully regulated introductions between prospective mating pairs and take into account the requirements for

enriched enclosures. Stimulating natural behaviour by providing adequate space to permit climbing minimizes stress. This, combined with a feeding program that fulfills the proper dietary requirements, has promoted more successful breeding in recent years.

In March 2011, two breeding females at the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere in Nashville, Tennessee gave birth to three cubs, which are being raised by zookeepers. Each cub weighed a half pound.^[17] In June 2011, two cubs were born at the Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma, Washington. The breeding pair was brought from the Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Thailand in an ongoing education and research exchange program.^[18]

As of December 2011, 222 clouded leopards are believed to exist in zoos.^[19]

Cultural influence

The Rukai people of Taiwan consider the clouded leopard to be their spiritual ancestor who led them to their homeland.^[20]

Etymology

The scientific name of the genus *Neofelis* is a composite of the Greek word νεο- meaning "new", and the Latin word *feles* meaning "cat", so it literally means "new cat."^{[21][22]}

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External links

- National Geographic page of the Clouded Leopard (<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/clouded-leopard.html>)
 - The Clouded Leopard Project (<http://www.cloudedleopard.org>)
 - Clouded leopard video (<http://www.maniacworld.com/Clouded-Leopards.html>)
 - WWF page on the clouded leopard (http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/clouded_leopard/)
 - BBC: video of a clouded leopard (http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/species/Clouded_Leopard)
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