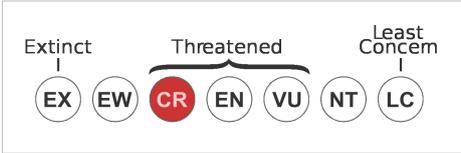


Iriomote Cat

Iriomote Cat ^[1]	
	
Taxidermy specimen	
Conservation status	
	
Critically Endangered (IUCN 3.1) ^[2]	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Genus:	<i>Prionailurus</i>
Species:	<i>P. iriomotensis</i>
Binomial name	
<i>Prionailurus iriomotensis</i> Imaizumi, 1967	
	
<i>Prionailurus iriomotensis</i> range	

The **Iriomote cat** (*Prionailurus iriomotensis*; Japanese: 西表山猫 *Iriomote-yamaneko*), is a wild cat about the size of a domestic cat that lives exclusively on the Japanese island of Iriomote. It is considered a "living fossil" by many biologists because it has not changed much from its primitive form. The Iriomote cat is one of the most threatened

species of cat (sometimes considered a subspecies of the leopard cat), with an estimated population of fewer than 100 individuals. It has dark brown fur and a bushy tail, and it is not able to sheathe its claws.^[3]

Nomenclature

When it was discovered in 1965,^[4] it was regarded as a survivor of an extinct line of felines and placed in a separate genus *Mayailurus* as *Mayailurus iriomotensis*. It was then assigned as a subspecies of the leopard cat, before being elevated to the species level again within the same genus of the leopard cat, *Prionailurus*.^[5] This view is still being discussed: some authorities still claim to classify the Iriomote cat as a separate species, since it looks quite different from the mainland leopard cat. It is known in Ryukyuan as *Yamamayaa* (やままやー, "mountain cat"), *Yamapikaryaa* ("mountain sparkling-eyed cat") or *Pingiimayaa* ("escaped cat") to the islanders of Iriomote. Its Japanese name is *Iriomote-yama neko* (イリオモテヤマネコ), with the same meaning as the English name.

Description

The Iriomote cat has dusky or greyish brown, dark spots in dense longitudinal rows that mark its body. The spots tend to coalesce into bands. Five or seven dark stripes run along its neck, and two white lines run from the corners of each eye across the cheeks. Thick and bushy, the tail is relatively short; spotted near the base it is ringed toward the tip. The backs of the rounded ears are dark with white central spots. The anterior upper premolar is absent. Approximately the same size as a domestic cat, the Iriomote cat has the characteristic elongated body, short legs and low-slung build of a predator which forages in thick undergrowth.

Females average body size is 48 cm (19 in) excluding the tail and males are slightly larger at 53–56 cm (21–22 in) excluding the tail. Both sexes are otherwise the same, with overall head and body length range of 38–65 cm (15–26 in). Height at shoulders is 25 cm (10 in), tail length averages 16–45 cm (6.3–18 in) and weight averages 3–7 kg (6.6–15.5 lb).

Behavior

The Iriomote cat is solitary but home ranges of individuals overlap. Male home ranges vary from 2.1 to 4.7 km², and those of females 0.95 to 1.55 km².

Hunting day and night both in trees and on the ground, the Iriomote cat is an opportunistic generalist predator. It is said to be more nocturnal in summer than winter. During the day it will hide in rock crevices or tree cavities, leaving to hunt at dusk. In captivity, it is an enthusiastic swimmer, playing in the water. Known to cross rivers in the wild, it probably also catches fish and crabs in the water. Hunting is usually a slow stalk finishing with a quick rush to kill.

Reproduction

Captive animals lose weight in winter and spend more time urine marking. This is seen as preparation for mating. They are more frequently seen in pairs in winter and often heard to vocalize. Males often fight. They meow and howl like domestic cats. Mating is believed to occur in February/March and September/October.

After a gestation of about 60 days, two to four kittens are born in a den in a rock crevice or hollow tree. The kittens mature much more rapidly than domestic cats, being left on their own when they are about three months old.

In 1999, a special study was published about the Iriomote cat's reproduction.^[6]

Diet

In one study 50% of the prey biomass was identified as mammalian in origin, with about 25% of the mass bird and 20% reptilian. In summer, the cat's emphasis on mammalian prey seems to change, with more birds and reptiles taken. Numerically, insects are important, making up one third of the total number of items found in scats with 39 species of beetle identified in them. The Iriomote cat is known to take fruit bats, black rats, wild boar, night herons, quail, rails, pigeons, doves, frogs, scops-owls, kingfishers, robins, thrushes, crows, and skinks.^{[7] [8]} More than 95 species of animal have been identified from its feces.

Distribution and habitats

The 292 km² island of Iriomote is at the southern end of the Japanese Ryukyu Islands, which are 200 km (125 mi) east of Taiwan (24° 15′–25′ north Latitude and 123° 40′–55′ east Longitude). The island is mountainous and covered in broadleaf, evergreen, subtropical rainforest with dense mangroves along the estuaries. The highest mountain is only 470 m (1540 ft).

This endemic cat is found, near water, all over the island, including beaches and cultivated land. It only avoids the most heavily populated areas. Unfortunately, it shows a preference for the coastal forest areas which are mostly outside the protected area of the island and through which the island's road has been constructed.

Conservation status

Barely 100 individuals survive due to habitat destruction and persecution/over-hunting.^[9] Although in 1977 the Iriomote cat was declared a National Japanese Treasure, pressures of development pose a very serious threat.^[10] One third of the island has been declared a reserve where the trapping of the cat for any reason is strictly prohibited. However, the species continues to decline. Izawa (1990) reported that the density of the cats was relatively low inside the National Park because they prefer forest edges, coastal areas and lowlands, most of which are outside the protected areas. There is no captive breeding population.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) has listed the Iriomote cat as Critically Endangered, on the verge of extinction.^[2] As the cat is not substantially traded, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) has only declared that international commerce must be strictly regulated, and has placed it on Appendix II.

Feral domestic cats compete with the Iriomote cat for food, but at the moment there appears to be no problem with the two species interbreeding. Hybridization would dilute the gene pool of the Iriomote cat and could be a disastrous long-term threat to the integrity of the species. Proposals have been made to eradicate all feral cats on the island.

The Japanese Environmental Agency set up feeding programmes for the native cat. Since 1979, domestic chickens have been provided at 20 feeding sites. However, this has caused problems as the cats now regard farmer's flocks as a natural food resource. In 1983, the Iriomote cat began to attack domestic chickens at village houses. A significant number have also been killed on the roads. Despite these problems, many of the inhabitants of Iriomote are proud of "their" cat.

Recent study

The Iriomote cat was first identified in 1967, by biologist Imaizumi. A new study focusing on the Iriomote cat is currently underway at the University of the Ryukyus, under the direction of Prof. Masako Izawa, who has been studying the cat since 1982.^[11]

Cultural

The Iriomote Cat has been designated by the government of Japan as a Special Natural Monument (see List of Special Places of Scenic Beauty, Special Historic Sites and Special Natural Monuments) under criteria 1.1: "well-known animals peculiar to Japan and their habitat".

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- [3] <http://www.ofcats.com/2007/09/iriomote-cat.html> a description of the species as whole and its current state
- [4] <http://www.jwildlifedis.org/cgi/content/abstract/26/2/236> Date of discovery and disease related information on the species
- [5] <http://jhered.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/78/2/105> Differences with other similar species
- [6] Okamura, Maki; Doi, Teruo; Sakaguchi, Noriaki; Izawa, Masako (2000). "Annual reproductive cycle of the Iriomote cat *Felis iriomotensis*". *Mammal Study* **25** (2): 75–85. doi:10.3106/mammalstudy.25.75.
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- [8] http://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/mammalstudy/30/2/30_151/_article The diet of the species
- [9] http://www.planet-asia.net/general_travel/general-travel_japan/rare_iriomote_cat_found_on_only_one_japanese_i.html?Itemid=205 current amount of species left
- [10] <http://www.environmentalgraffiti.com/ecology/japan%E2%80%99s-iriomote-cat-headed-for-annihilation/248> The current protection status of the species
- [11] 2007, National Geographic: National Geographic : Rare Japanese Wildcat Edging Closer to Extinction (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/08/070829-rarest-cat.html>)

External links

- BBC's article on the Iriomote (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/wildfacts/factfiles/41.shtml>)
- More information on Iriomotes (<http://www.lioncrusher.com/animal.asp?animal=52>)
- New York Times article on the Iriomote and development threats (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/05/world/asia/05wildcat.html>)
- National Geographic : Rare Japanese Wildcat Edging Closer to Extinction (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/08/070829-rarest-cat.html>) - (content not yet include in this wiki article)
- Google Scholar: Iriomote cat (<http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Iriomote+cat>), Izawa (<http://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=Masako+Izawa+Iriomote+cat>).

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