

Jaguarundi

Jaguarundi ^[1]	
	
Conservation status	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Extinct</p> <p>EX</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>EW</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Threatened</p> <p>CR</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>EN</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>VU</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>NT</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Least Concern</p> <p>LC</p> </div> </div> <p>Least Concern (IUCN 3.1)^[2]</p>	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Genus:	<i>Puma</i>
Species:	<i>P. yagouarundi</i>
Binomial name	
<p><i>Puma yagouarundi</i> (Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, 1803)^[3]</p>	



The **jaguarundi** (*Puma yagouaroundi*) is a small-sized wild cat native to Central and South America. In 2002, the IUCN classified the jaguarundi as *Least Concern* as it is likely that no conservation units, with the probable exception of the mega-reserves of the Amazon basin could sustain long-term viable populations. It is probably extinct in Texas. Its presence in Uruguay is uncertain.^[2]

Etymology and naming

The two Color phases were once thought to represent two distinct species; the grey one called *jaguarundi* English pronunciation: /ˌʒæɡwəˈrʌndi/ *zhag-wə-run-dee*,^[4] and the red one called *eyra*. In some Spanish speaking countries, the jaguarundi is also called *leoncillo*, which means *little lion*. Other Spanish common names for the jaguarundi include: "gato colorado", "gato moro", "león brenero", "onza", and "tigrillo".^[5]

Description



In terms of physical appearance, the jaguarundi is perhaps the least cat-like of all the cats. It has a total length of 53 to 77 cm (21 to 30 in), not including the 31 to 60 cm (12 to 24 in) tail, and weighs 3.5 to 9.1 kg (7.7 to 20 lb).^{[6] [7] [8]}

It has short legs, an elongated body and a long tail, giving it an appearance somewhat like an otter or marten. For this reason, these animals are sometimes referred to as "otter cats." The ears are short and rounded. The coat is unspotted and uniform in color, with, at most, a few faint markings on the face and underside. The coat can be either blackish to brownish grey (grey phase) or foxy red to chestnut (red phase); individuals of both phases can be born in the same litter.^[6]

Distribution and habitat

The jaguarundi is found from southern Texas and coastal Mexico in the north, through central and south America east of the Andes, and as far south as northern Argentina. Its habitat is lowland brush areas close to a source of running water, and may include anything from dry thorn forest to wet grassland. While commonly found in the lowlands, they have been reported at elevations as high as 3200 metres (10500 ft).^[6] Jaguarundis also occasionally inhabit dense tropical areas.

Jaguarundis have also been sighted in the U.S. state of Florida since the early 20th century. Here, the species is thought to be introduced, but it is not known when the introduction occurred. Their presence in Florida is said to have been the work of a writer who at some point imported the animals from their native habitat and released them near his hometown of Chiefland and in other locations across the state. No live or dead specimens have been found, but there have been many sightings considered credible by biologists. The earliest of these occurred in 1907, and was followed by various additional sightings throughout the Florida Peninsula from the 1930s through the 1950s. The first official report was released in 1942. There were significantly fewer reliable sightings after that, and by 1977 W. T. Neill concluded in a report that the population had declined. However, sightings have continued.^[9]

There have also been sightings of jaguarundis in the coastal area of the U.S. state of Alabama. This may be evidence of the Florida population migrating westward.^[9]

Behavior

Jaguarundis are primarily diurnal, being active during the day rather than evenings or night time. They are comfortable in trees, but prefer to hunt on the ground. They will eat almost any small animal that they can catch, typically catching a mixture of rodents, small reptiles, and ground-feeding birds. They have also been observed to kill larger prey, such as rabbits, and opossums; relatively unusual prey include fish and even marmosets. Like many other cats they also include a small amount of vegetation and arthropods in their diet.^[6]

Although they seem to be somewhat more gregarious than many other cats, willing to tolerate the close presence of other members of their species, in the wild they are generally encountered alone, suggesting a solitary lifestyle. Their home range is widely variable, depending on the local environment; individuals have been reported as ranging over territories of anything from 6.8 to 100 square kilometres (2.6 to 39 sq mi). Like other cats, they scent mark their territory by scratching the ground or nearby branches, head-rubbing, urination, and leaving their faeces uncovered.^[6] They are shy and reclusive, and evidently very cautious of man-made traps.^[9]

Jaguarundis make an unusually wide range of vocalisations, including purrs, whistles, yaps, chattering sounds, and even a bird-like chirp.^[6]



Gray color phase

Reproduction

The timing of the breeding season among jaguarundis is unclear; it may be that they breed all year round. Oestrus lasts three to five days, and is marked by the female regularly rolling onto her back and spraying urine. After a gestation period of 70 to 75 days, the female gives birth to a litter of one to four kittens in a den constructed in a dense thicket, hollow tree, or similar cover.^[6]

The kittens are born with spots on their underside, which disappear as they age. They are capable of taking solid food at around six weeks, although they begin to play with their mother's food as early as three weeks. Jaguarundis become sexually mature at approximately two years of age, and have lived for up to ten years in captivity.^[6]

Taxonomy and evolution

This cat is closely related to the much larger and heavier cougar as evident by its similar genetic structure and chromosome count; both species are in the genus *Puma* although it is sometimes classified under a separate genus, *Herpailurus* and until recently, both cats were classified under the genus *Felis*.

According to a 2006 genomic study of Felidae, an ancestor of today's *Leopardus*, *Lynx*, *Puma*, *Prionailurus*, and *Felis* lineages migrated across the Bering land bridge into the Americas approximately 8 to 8.5 million years ago. The lineages subsequently diverged in that order.^[10]

Studies have indicated that the cougar and jaguarundi are next most closely related to the modern cheetah of Africa and western Asia,^{[10] [11]} but the relationship is unresolved. It has been suggested that ancestors of the cheetah diverged from the *Puma* lineage in the Americas and migrated back to Asia and Africa,^{[10] [11]} while other research suggests the cheetah diverged in the Old World itself.^[12] The outline of small feline migration to the Americas is thus unclear (see also American cheetah).



A Jaguarundi in the zoo in Děčín, Czech Republic

Conservation

This cat is not particularly sought after for its fur, but it is suffering decline due to loss of habitat. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has expressed concern that the presence of the Jaguarundi in South Texas may be imperiled due to loss of the cat's native habitat.^[13]

The jaguarundi has been sighted around the Guiana Space Centre in French Guiana.^[14]

Subspecies

- *Puma yagouaroundi armeghinoi* (Holmberg, 1898) (Western Argentina, Far-Eastern Chile)
- *Puma yagouaroundi cacomitli* (Berlandier, 1859) – Gulf Coast Jaguarundi (southern Texas and eastern Mexico)
- *Puma yagouaroundi eyra* (G.Fischer, 1814) (Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina)
- *Puma yagouaroundi fossata* (Mearns, 1901) – Guatemalan Jaguarundi (southern Mexico to Honduras)
- *Puma yagouaroundi melantho* (Thomas, 1914) (Peru and Brazil)
- *Puma yagouaroundi panamensis* (J.A.Allen, 1904) – Panamanian Jaguarundi (Nicaragua to Ecuador)
- *Puma yagouaroundi tolteca* (Thomas, 1898) – Sinaloan Jaguarundi (western Mexico; unconfirmed sightings have been reported in Arizona and Sonora)^[7]
- *Puma yagouaroundi yagouaroundi* (Geoffroy, 1803) -Geoffroy's Jaguarundi (Guyana and the Amazon Rainforest)^[3]

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