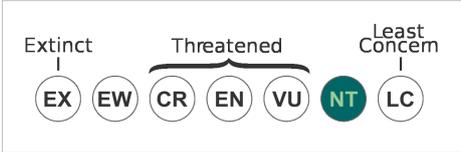


# Margay

**Margay<sup>[1]</sup>**



**Conservation status**



Near Threatened (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. wiedii</i>

**Binomial name**

***Leopardus wiedii***  
(Schinz, 1821)



Margay range
<b>Synonyms</b>
• <i>Felis wiedii</i>

The **Margay** (*Leopardus wiedii*) is a spotted cat native to Middle and South America. Named for Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied,<sup>[3]</sup> it is a solitary and nocturnal animal that prefers remote sections of the rainforest. Although it was once believed to be vulnerable to extinction, the IUCN now lists it as "Near Threatened".<sup>[2]</sup> It roams the rainforests from Mexico to Argentina.

## Physical characteristics



A margay at Edinburgh Zoo

The margay is very similar to the larger ocelot in appearance, although the head is a little shorter, the eyes larger, and the tail and legs longer. It weighs from 2.6 to 4 kilograms (5.7 to 8.8 lb), with a body length of 48 to 79 centimetres (19 to 31 in), and a tail length of 33 to 51 centimetres (13 to 20 in). Unlike most other cats, the female possesses only two teats.<sup>[4]</sup>

The fur is brown in colour, and marked with numerous rows of dark brown or black rosettes and longitudinal streaks. The undersides are paler, ranging from buff to white, and the tail has numerous dark bands and a black tip. The backs of the ears are black with circular white markings in the centre.<sup>[4]</sup>

Most notably the margay is a much more skillful climber than its relative, and it is sometimes called the **tree ocelot** because of this ability. Whereas the ocelot mostly pursues prey on the ground, the margay may spend its entire life in the trees, leaping after and chasing birds and monkeys through the treetops. Indeed, it is one of only two cat species<sup>[4]</sup> with the ankle flexibility necessary to climb head-first down trees (the other being the clouded leopard). It is remarkably agile; its ankles can turn up to 180 degrees,<sup>[5]</sup> it can grasp branches equally well with its fore and hind paws, and it is able to jump up to 12 feet (3.7 m) horizontally.<sup>[4]</sup> The margay has been observed to hang from branches with only one foot.

The margay is considered by some to be the true jungle cat, because it spends almost its entire life in trees.

## Distribution and habitat

The margay is found from southern Mexico, through Central America and in northern South America east of the Andes. The southern edge of its range reaches Uruguay and northern Argentina. They are found almost exclusively in areas of dense forest, ranging from tropical evergreen forest to tropical dry forest and high cloud forest. Margays have sometimes also been observed in coffee and cocoa plantations.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Diet

Because the margay is mostly nocturnal and is naturally rare in its environment, most dietary studies have been based on stomach contents and fecal analysis. This cat eats small mammals (sometimes including monkeys), birds, eggs, lizards and tree frogs.<sup>[6]</sup> It may also eat grass and other vegetation, most likely to help digestion. A 2006 report about a margay chasing squirrels in its natural environment confirmed the margay is able to hunt its prey entirely in trees.<sup>[7]</sup> However, margays do sometimes hunt on the ground, and have been reported to eat terrestrial prey, such as cane rats and guinea pigs.<sup>[4]</sup>

There has been one report of a margay using auditory mimicry to try to lure one of its prey. A margay was observed to imitate the call of a pied tamarin infant while in the presence of a group of adult tamarins, leading the adults to investigate. While the margay was not successful in catching one of the monkeys, this represents the first observation of a Neotropical predator employing this type of mimicry.<sup>[8] [9]</sup>



Margay in Summit Municipal Parque, Panama

## Behavior

Margays are primarily nocturnal, although in some areas, they have also been observed to hunt during the day. They prefer to spend most of their life in the trees, but also travel across the ground, especially when moving between hunting areas. During the day, they rest in relatively inaccessible branches or clumps of lianas.

Like most cats, they are solitary, with the adults only commonly meeting to mate. They are sparsely distributed even within their natural environment, occupying relatively large home ranges of 11 to 16 square kilometres (4.2 to 6.2 sq mi). They use scent marking to indicate their territory, including urine spraying and leaving scratch marks on the ground or on branches. Their vocalisations all appear to be short range; they do not call to each other over long distances.<sup>[4]</sup>

Margays have recently been discovered to hunt by mimicking the vocalisation of a prey species, Wild Pied Tamarin (*Saguinus bicolor*),<sup>[10]</sup> which has been compared by scientists to tool-use by monkeys.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Reproduction and life cycle

Female margays are in estrus for four to ten days over a cycle of 32 to 36 days, during which they attract males with a long, moaning call. The male responds by yelping or making trilling sounds, and also by rapidly shaking his head from side to side, a behavior not seen in any other cat species. Copulation lasts up to sixty seconds, and is similar to that in domestic cats; it takes place primarily in the trees, and occurs several times while the female is in heat.<sup>[4]</sup>

Gestation lasts about 80 days, and results in the birth of only a single kitten (or, very rarely, two), usually between March and June. The kittens weigh 85 to 170 grams (3.0 to 6.0 oz) at birth. This is relatively large for a small cat, and is probably related to the long gestation period. The kittens open their eyes at around two weeks of age, and begin to take solid food at seven to eight weeks.<sup>[4]</sup>

Margays reach sexual maturity at twelve to eighteen months of age, and have been reported to live up to twenty-four years in captivity.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Subspecies

These are the currently recognized subspecies:<sup>[1]</sup>

- *Leopardus wiedii wiedii*, eastern and central Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, northern Argentina
- *Leopardus wiedii amazonicus*, western Brazil, inner parts of Peru, Colombia and Venezuela
- *Leopardus wiedii boliviae*, Bolivia - also known as the "ocelittle"
- *Leopardus wiedii cooperi*, northern Mexico
- *Leopardus wiedii glauculus*, central Mexico
- *Leopardus wiedii nicaraguae*, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica
- *Leopardus wiedii oaxacensis*, southern Mexico
- *Leopardus wiedii pirrensis*, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru
- *Leopardus wiedii salvinius*, Chiapas, Guatemala, El Salvador
- *Leopardus wiedii yucatanicus*, Yucatán

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## External links

- Smithsonian Institution - North American Mammals: *Leopardus wiedii* ([http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image\\_info.cfm?species\\_id=129](http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image_info.cfm?species_id=129))
  - Smithsonian Wild: *Leopardus wiedii* (<http://siwild.si.edu/content/animal-groups/cats/margay.htm?species=29>)
  - Ecology of the Ocelot and Margay (<http://www.ecology.info/ecology-ocelot-margay.htm>)
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