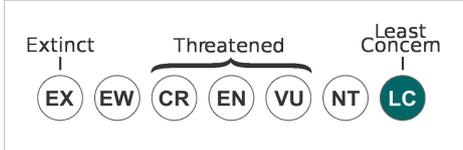


# Ocelot

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



**Conservation status**



Least Concern (IUCN 3.1)<sup>[2]</sup>

**Scientific classification**

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Genus:	<i>Leopardus</i>
Species:	<i><b>L. pardalis</b></i>

**Binomial name**

***Leopardus pardalis***  
(Linnaeus, 1758)



The **ocelot** (*Leopardus pardalis*), pronounced /'ɒsəˌlɒt/, also known as the **dwarf leopard** or **McKenney's wildcat** is a wild cat distributed over South and Central America and Mexico, but has been reported as far north as Texas and in Trinidad, in the Caribbean. North of Mexico, it is found regularly only in the extreme southern part of Texas,<sup>[3]</sup> although there are rare sightings in Southern Arizona.<sup>[4]</sup>

The ocelot is similar in appearance to a domestic cat. Its fur resembles that of a clouded leopard or jaguar and was once regarded as particularly valuable. As a result, hundreds of thousands of ocelots were once killed for their fur. The feline was classified a "vulnerable" endangered species from 1972 until 1996, but is now rated "least concern" by the 2008 IUCN Red List.

## Etymology

The name *ocelot* comes from the Nahuatl word *ōcēlōtl* (pronounced [oːˈseːloːtɬ]), which usually refers to the jaguar (*Panthera onca*) rather than the ocelot.<sup>[5] [6] [7]</sup>

## Taxonomy

The ocelot's genus *Leopardus* consists of nine similar species to the ocelot, such as Geoffroy's cat and the margay, which are also endemic to South and Central America. All of the cats in the *Leopardus* genus are spotted, lithe, and small, with the ocelot being the biggest of its genus.

## Subspecies

Certain ocelot subspecies are officially endangered, although the species as a whole is not. The following are the currently recognized subspecies of Ocelot:<sup>[1]</sup>

- *Leopardus pardalis pardalis*, Amazon Rainforest
- *Leopardus pardalis aequatorialis*, northern Andes and Central America
- *Leopardus pardalis albescens*, eastern Mexico, southern Texas
- *Leopardus pardalis melanurus*, Venezuela, Guyana, Trinidad
- *Leopardus pardalis mitis*, Argentina, Paraguay
- *Leopardus pardalis nelsoni*, southwestern Mexico
- *Leopardus pardalis pseudopardalis*, Colombia
- *Leopardus pardalis puseaus*, Ecuador

- *Leopardus pardalis sonoriensis*, northwestern Mexico, southern Arizona
- *Leopardus pardalis steinbachi*, Bolivia

## Physical characteristics

The ocelot ranges from 68 to 100 centimetres (27 to 39 in) in length, plus 26 to 45 centimeters (10 to 18 in) in tail length, and typically weighs 8 to 18 kilograms (18 to 40 lb), although much larger individuals have occasionally been recorded,<sup>[8] [9] [10]</sup> making it the largest of the generally dainty *Leopardus* wild cat genus. It has sleek, smooth fur, rounded ears and relatively large front paws. While similar in appearance to the oncilla and margay, which inhabit the same region, the ocelot is larger.

The coat pattern of ocelots can vary, being anything from cream to reddish-brown in color, or sometimes grayish, and marked with black rosettes. In many individuals, some of the spots, especially on the back, blend together to form irregular curved stripes or bands. The fur is short, and paler than the rest of the coat beneath. There are also single white spots, called ocelli, on the backs of the ears. Two black stripes line both sides of the face, and the long tail is banded by black.

## Behavior

The ocelot is mostly nocturnal and very territorial. It will fight fiercely, sometimes to the death, in territorial disputes. In addition, the cat marks its territory with urine. Like most felines, it is solitary, usually meeting only to mate. However, during the day it rests in trees or other dense foliage, and will occasionally share its spot with another ocelot of the same sex. Males occupy territories of 3.5 to 46 square kilometers (1.4 to 18 sq mi), while females occupy smaller, non-overlapping territories of 0.8 to 15 square kilometers (0.31 to 5.8 sq mi). Territories are marked by urine spraying and by leaving feces in prominent locations, sometimes favoring particular latrine sites.<sup>[9]</sup>

Ocelots hunt over a range of 18 km<sup>2</sup> (6.9 sq mi), taking mostly small mammals (various rodents), reptiles and amphibians (lizards, turtles and frogs), crab, birds and fish.<sup>[11]</sup> Almost all of the prey that the ocelot hunts is far smaller than itself, with rodents, rabbits, and opossums forming the largest part of the diet.<sup>[9]</sup> Studies suggest that it follows and finds prey via odor trails, but the ocelot also has very good vision, including night vision.

## Reproduction and life cycle

Ocelots typically breed only once every other year, although the female may mate again shortly after losing a litter. Mating can occur at any time of year, and estrus lasts from seven to ten days. After mating, the female will find a den in a cave in a rocky bluff, a hollow tree, or a dense (preferably thorny) thicket. Gestation lasts 79 to 82 days, and usually results in the birth of only a single kitten, with its eyes closed and a thin covering of hair. Litters of two or three kittens also occur, but are less common. The small litter size and relative infrequency of breeding make the ocelot particularly vulnerable to population loss.<sup>[9]</sup>

Compared with other small cats, ocelot kittens grow quite slowly. They weigh around 250 grams (8.8 oz) at birth, and do not open their eyes for fifteen to eighteen days. They begin to leave the den at three months, but remain with their mother for up to two years, before dispersing to establish their own territory. Ocelots live for up to twenty years in captivity.<sup>[9]</sup>



An ocelot at Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Washington.

## Distribution and habitat



Moche Ocelot. 200 A.D. Larco Museum Collection Lima, Peru

The ocelot is distributed over South and Central America and Mexico, but has been reported as far north as Texas and in Trinidad, in the Caribbean.<sup>[12]</sup> Countries in this range are: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Nicaragua, Suriname, United States and Venezuela. It's likely extinct in Uruguay.<sup>[2]</sup>

The ocelot once inhabited chaparral thickets of the Gulf Coast of south and eastern Texas, and could be found in Arizona, Louisiana, and Arkansas.<sup>[13]</sup> In the United States, it now ranges only in several small areas of dense thicket in South Texas and is rarely sighted in Arizona. On November 7, 2009, an ocelot was photographed in the mountains of Cochise County, Arizona. This was the first such verifiable evidence of the feline's presence in the state.<sup>[14]</sup> In February 2011, the Arizona

Game and Fish Department confirmed the sighting of another ocelot in the Huachuca Mountains of southern Arizona.<sup>[15]</sup>

The ocelot's continued presence in the U.S. is questionable, as a result largely of the introduction of dogs, being shot by ranchers, the loss of habitat, and the introduction of highways. Young male ocelots are frequently killed by cars during their search for a territory.

Ocelots only inhabit areas with relatively dense vegetation cover, although they may occasionally hunt in more open areas at night. They are found in tropical forest, thorn forest, mangrove swamps and savanna, at elevations ranging up to 1200 meters (3900 ft).<sup>[9]</sup>

## As pets

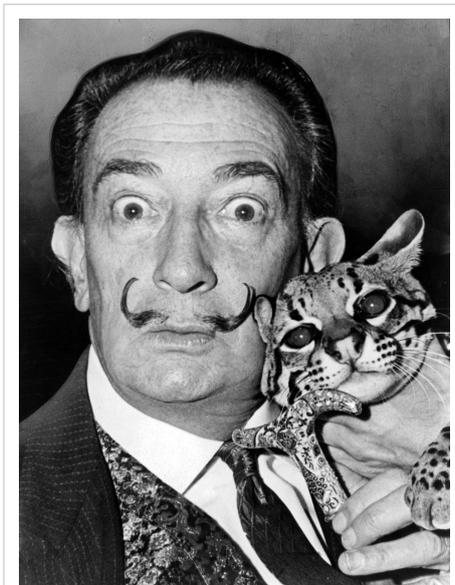
Like many wild cats, it is occasionally kept as a pet. Salvador Dalí frequently traveled with his pet ocelot Babou,<sup>[16]</sup> even bringing it aboard the luxury ocean liner, *SS France*.<sup>[17]</sup> Musician Gram Parsons kept an ocelot as a pet in the back yard swimming pool area of his family's Winter Haven, Florida, home during his teens, in the mid-1960s.<sup>[18]</sup>

The Moche people of ancient Peru worshipped animals and often depicted the ocelot in their art.<sup>[19]</sup>

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Salvador Dalí and Babou the ocelot

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## External links

- CSG Species Accounts: Ocelot (<http://lynx.uio.no/lynx/catsgportal/cat-website/catfolk/ocelot01.htm>)
- Ocelot Behavior & Care, by Mindy Stinner (<http://www.exoticcatz.com/spocelotstinner.html>)
- Ecology of the Ocelot and Margay (<http://www.ecology.info/ecology-ocelot-margay.htm>)

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