

Clouded Leopard

Neofelis nebulosa



Classification

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Felidae

Genus: *Neofelis*

Species: *nebulosa*

Range

Clouded leopards are found in Southeast Asia from southern China and central Nepal through Thailand, Malaysia, Borneo, and Sumatra. They have also been recorded in Himalayan foothills up to 5,000 feet (1,524m).

Habitat

The clouded leopard is usually most closely associated with primary tropical rain forest, but it also makes use of other types of habitat. Sightings have been made in secondary and logged forests as well as grassland and scrub and they are known to occur in mangrove swamps in Borneo.

Description

Head and body length: 24 - 43 inches (.6 - 1.09m)

Tail length: 24 - 35 inches (.6 - .89m)

Weight: 35 - 50 pounds (15.8 - 22.7kg)

The clouded leopard is named for its distinctive markings - ellipses edged in black with the insides a darker color than the background color of the pelt. The pelt color varies from a tawny to silvery grey. The back of the neck is marked with thick black bars. The long tail is thick and plush and encircled with black rings. The legs of the clouded leopard are short, but its canines are relatively the longest of any felid. Clouded leopards are intermediate in size between large and small cats, but are considered most closely related to the "big" cats based on biology and behavior.

Behavior

Clouded leopards are one of the most arboreal of all cats. They are able to run down tree trunks headfirst, climb by hanging underneath horizontal branches, and even hang upside down from branches by their hind feet. They may forage to some degree in trees and will use them for resting areas. Clouded leopards' tails can be as long as their bodies - about three feet - aiding them in balance. Recent studies of wild clouded leopards indicate that they are primarily crepuscular (active dawn and dusk), but also exhibit nocturnal tendencies. However, radio-collared cats have demonstrated activity at all hours of the day.

Diet

Clouded leopards are carnivores. Their diet is thought to consist of birds, primates, and small mammals, as well as larger prey such as porcupines, deer, and wild pigs.

Reproduction

After a gestation of approximately 90 days, a litter of 1 - 5 is born (most often 3). At birth, kittens weigh five to six ounces (142-170g). Virtually nothing is known about reproduction in the wild, but captive animals form strong pair bonds that may last a lifetime. In captivity, it is almost impossible to introduce two adult animals as severe fighting may occur, often resulting in serious or fatal injuries to the much smaller female. However if a pair of cats is introduced and given opportunities to bond at an early age, breeding is often more successful. Animals are sexually mature at the age of two.

Lifespan

Captive animals have been recorded living up to 17 years. Life span is unknown for cats in the wild, although it is undoubtedly much less.

Status

CITES: Appendix I (Commercial trade prohibited). U.S. Fish and Wildlife: Endangered species. The clouded leopard is protected throughout most of its range. Deforestation is the principle threat to the clouded leopard, although the seriousness depends upon further study of the species' tolerance of various degrees of forest clearance. The clouded leopard is also widely hunted for its teeth and pelt and for bones for the traditional Asian medicinal trade. Although they are protected, clouded leopard pelts have been reported on sale in urban markets in many Asian countries. This cat is thought to now be extinct in Taiwan due to hunting pressure. Clouded leopard cubs are sometimes captured and kept as pets in Asian households.