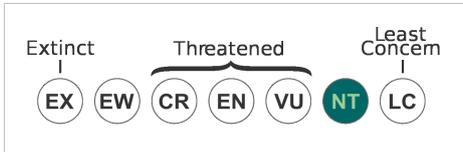
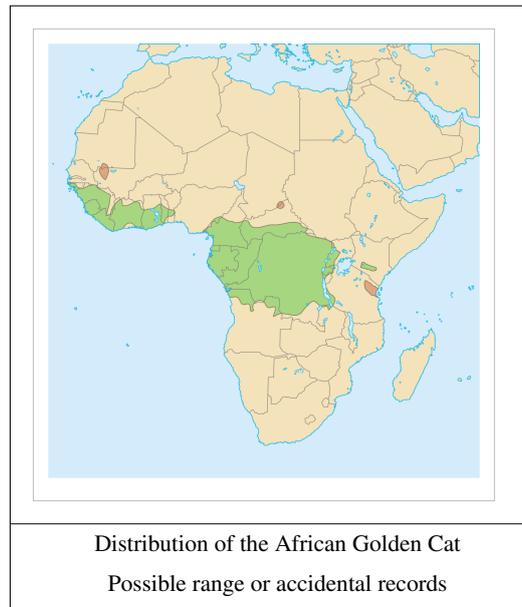


African Golden Cat

African Golden Cat ^[1]	
	
Conservation status	
	
Near Threatened (IUCN 3.1) ^[2]	
Scientific classification	
Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Mammalia
Order:	Carnivora
Family:	Felidae
Subfamily:	Felinae
Genus:	<i>Profelis</i> (Severtzov, 1858)
Species:	<i>P. aurata</i>
Binomial name	
<i>Profelis aurata</i> (Temminck, 1827)	
Subspecies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Profelis aurata aurata</i> • <i>Profelis aurata cottoni</i> 	



The **African Golden Cat** (*Profelis aurata*) is a medium-sized wild cat distributed over the rainforests of West and Central Africa. It is about 80 centimetres (31 in) long, and has a tail of about 30 centimetres (12 in) in length. It is a close relative of both the Caracal and the Serval,^[3] but current classification places it as the only member of the genus *Profelis*.^[1]

Description

The African Golden Cat has variable fur color, typically ranging from cinnamon or reddish-brown to grey, although melanistic forms also exist. They can be either spotted, with the spotting ranging from faded tan to heavy black in color, or not spotted at all. Their undersides, areas around the eyes, cheeks, chin and throat are generally lighter in color and may be almost white. Their tail is darker on the top and may be heavily banded, lightly banded, or plain, although it always ends in a black tip. Those cats in the western parts of its range tend to have heavier spotting than those in the eastern areas. Two color morphs, a red and a grey phase, were once thought to indicate separate species, rather than variations of the same species.^[4]

African Golden Cats are about twice the size of a domestic cat. Their rounded head is very small in relation to their body size. They are a heavily built cat, with stocky, long legs, a relatively short tail, and large paws. Body length usually varies within the range 62 to 101 centimetres (24 to 40 in). Tail length ranges from 16 to 35 centimetres (6.3 to 14 in), and shoulder height is about 38 to 55 centimetres (15 to 22 in). The cat weighs around 8 to 16 kilograms (18 to 35 lb), with males being larger than females.^[5]

Overall, the African Golden Cat resembles the Caracal, but has shorter un-tufted ears and a longer tail. Despite the wide variation in coat color, pelts of African Golden Cats can be identified by the presence of a distinctive whorled ridge of fur in front of the shoulders, where the hairs change direction.^[5]

Distribution and habitat

The African Golden Cat inhabits tropical forests from sea level to 3000 metres (9800 ft). It prefers dense, moist forest with heavy undergrowth, and is often found close to rivers, but it may also be found in cloud forest, bamboo forests, and also in high moorland habitats. The cat is found from Senegal in the west to Kenya in the east, and ranges as far north as the Central African Republic and as far south as northern Angola.^[5]

Behavior and diet

Due to its extremely reclusive habits, little is known about the behavior of the African Golden Cat. They are solitary animals, and are normally crepuscular or nocturnal, although they have also been observed hunting during the day, depending on the availability of local prey.^[5]

The African Golden Cat is able to climb, but hunts primarily on the ground. It mainly feeds on rodents, but also includes birds, small monkeys, duikers, giant forest hogs and small antelope in its diet. These cats have also been known to take domestic poultry and livestock.^{[4] [5]}

Reproduction

Knowledge of the African Golden Cat's reproductive habits is based on captive specimens. They breed readily in captivity. The mother gives birth to one or two kittens after a gestation period of around 75 days. The kittens weigh 180 to 235 grams (6.3 to 8.3 oz), but grow and develop rapidly in comparison with other small cat species. One individual was reported to be scaling a 40 centimetres (16 in) wall within sixteen days of birth, reflecting a high degree of physical agility from an early age. The kittens' eyes open within a week of birth, and they are weaned at 6–8 weeks. Females reach sexual maturity at eleven months of age, but the males do not do so until eighteen months.^[5]

These cats live up to twelve years in captivity, but their lifespan in the wild is unknown.^[5]

Subspecies

There are two subspecies of the African Golden Cat:

- *Profelis aurata aurata* - from Congo to Uganda
- *Profelis aurata celidogaster* - throughout Western Africa

Each of the subspecies has two distinct spotting patterns. *P. a. aurata* can either have spots just on its lower body, or no spots at all except a few indistinct spots on the belly. *P. a. celidogaster* can either be spotted all over, or have a few spots on the back and neck with a few large spots on the sides of the body.^[4]

The African Golden Cat is similar to the Asian Golden Cat, However, genetic analysis has determined that they are not closely related^[6]. Its closest relatives are the Caracal *Caracal caracal* and Serval *Leptailurus serval*. The Asian Golden Cat *Pardofelis temminckii* belongs to the genus *Pardofelis*

References

- [1] Wozencraft, W. Christopher (16 November 2005). "Order Carnivora (pp. 532-628)" (<http://www.bucknell.edu/msw3>). In Wilson, Don E., and Reeder, DeeAnn M., eds. *Mammal Species of the World: A Taxonomic and Geographic Reference* (<http://google.com/books?id=JgAMbNSt8ikC&pg=PA544>) (3rd ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2 vols. (2142 pp.). pp. 544. ISBN 978-0-8018-8221-0. OCLC 62265494. .
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- [3] Johnson et al.. *The Late Miocene Radiaton of Modern Felidae: A Genetic Assessment*. pp. 73–77, Science Vol. 311.
- [4] Postanowicz, Rebecca. "African Golden Cat (*Profelis aurata*)" (<http://lioncrusher.com/animal.asp?animal=36>). . Retrieved 2009-05-12.
- [5] Sunquist, Mel; Sunquist, Fiona (2002). *Wild cats of the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 246–251. ISBN 0-226-77999-8.
- [6] Macdonald, D and Loveridge, A. (2010). *The Biology and Conservation of Wild Felids*. Oxford University Press. ISBN13: 9780199234448

External links

- Rare African Golden Cat sightings (<http://cercopan.wildlifedirect.org/2009/04/30/a-new-cat-in-town/>)
- Elusive golden cat caught on film in Uganda (black & white) (2009) (http://news.bbc.co.uk/earth/hi/earth_news/newsid_8259000/8259573.stm) and Gabon (colour) (2011) (<http://news.blogs.cnn.com/2011/08/29/scientists-capture-rare-video-of-elusive-african-cat/>)

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