

# European Wildcat

| European Wildcat <sup>[1]</sup>   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
|                          |                         |
| Scientific classification   |                         |
| Kingdom:  | Animalia                |
| Phylum:   | Chordata                |
| Class:  | Mammalia                |
| Order:  | Carnivora               |
| Family:   | Felidae                 |
| Genus:  | <i>Felis</i>            |
| Species:  | <i>F. silvestris</i>    |
| Subspecies:   | <i>F. s. silvestris</i> |
| Trinomial name  |                         |
| <i>Felis silvestris silvestris</i><br>Schreber, 1775  |                         |
|                        |                         |
| Approximate Eurasian Wildcat range within Europe (also in Turkey and Caucasus), but see <i>Taxonomy</i> . |                         |

The **European Wildcat** (*Felis silvestris silvestris*) is a subspecies of the wildcat that inhabits forests of Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as Scotland, Turkey and the Caucasus Mountains; it has been extirpated from Scandinavia, England, and Wales. Some authorities restrict *F. s. silvestris* to populations of the European mainland, in which case populations of Scotland, Mediterranean islands, Turkey and Caucasus are regarded as separate subspecies.

The physical appearance of the European Wildcat is much bulkier than that of the African Wildcat and the Domestic Cat. The thick fur and size are distinguishing traits; the Wildcat normally would not be mistaken for the Domestic Cat although in practice it is less clear whether the two are correctly distinguished (one study showed an error rate of 39%<sup>[2]</sup>). In contrast to the Domestic Cat, it is most active in the daytime.

## Status

Wildcats were common in the European Pleistocene era; when the ice vanished, they became adapted to a life in dense forests. In most European countries they have become very rare. Although legally protected, they are still shot by hunters mistaking them for domestic cats. In the Scottish Highlands, where approximately 400 are thought to be remaining in the wild, interbreeding with feral cats is a significant threat to the wild population.<sup>[3]</sup> Although Spain and Portugal are the West European countries with the greatest population of wild cats, the animals in these region are threatened by breeding with feral cats and loss of habitat. The easternmost populations, in Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus, have low levels of domestic cat hybridization.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Taxonomy

Two forms coexisted in large numbers in the Iberian Peninsula: the common European form, north of the Douro and Ebro rivers, and the giant Iberian form, previously considered a different subspecies *F. s. tartessia*, in the rest of the territory. The last is one of the heaviest subspecies of *Felis silvestris*; in his book *Pleistocene Mammals of Europe* (1963), palaeontologist Dr. Björn Kurtén noted that this subspecies conserves the same size of the form that lived in all Europe during the Pleistocene.

Many authorities restrict the subspecies *Felis silvestris silvestris* to the populations of the European mainland, but in 2007 a genetic study suggested that all European populations (including islands), as well as populations in Turkey and the Caucasus Mountains, belong in this subspecies.<sup>[4]</sup> Alternatively, the small population of Scottish Wildcats is *F. s. grampia*, the Caucasian Wildcat (also including wildcats in Turkey) is *F. s. caucasica*, the possibly extinct Crete Wildcat is *F. s. cretensis*, the Balearic Wildcat is *F. s. jordansi*, and the possibly extinct Corsican Wildcat is *F. s. reyi*.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 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=PA536-537>) (3rd ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2 vols. (2142 pp.). pp. 536-537. ISBN 978-0-8018-8221-0. OCLC 62265494. .
- [2] "European Wildcat" (<http://www.catsg.org/catsgportal/cat-website/catfolk/wilder05.htm>). IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group (IUCN - The World Conservation Union). . Retrieved 2007-01-02.
- [3] Scottish Wildcats ([http://www.electricscotland.com/lifestyle/scottish\\_wildcats.htm](http://www.electricscotland.com/lifestyle/scottish_wildcats.htm))
- [4] Driscoll, Menotti-Raymond, Roca, Hupe, Johnson, Geffen, Harley, Delibes, Pontier, Kitchener, Yamaguchi, O'Brien, & Macdonald (2007). *The Near Eastern Origin of Cat Domestication*. *Science* 317 (5837): 519-523

## External links

- Scottish Wildcat Association (<http://www.scottishwildcats.co.uk/>) charitable organisation with the aim of conserving the unique Scottish wildcat in the West Highlands through the Wildcat Haven Project (<http://www.wildcathaven.co.uk/>)
- Kreiszeitung: *Wildkatzen rücken nach Norden vor* (Wildcats Reach The North) (<http://www.kreiszeitung.de/nachrichten/lokales/niedersachsen/wildkatzen-ruecken-nach-norden-1131024.html>) (German)
- Discoverwildlife.com: *Wildcat gallery by Fabrice Cahez* (<http://www.discoverwildlife.com/gallery/wildcat-gallery-fabrice-cahez>)

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