

# Desert Cat

The Indian subcontinent is home to a diverse range of wildlife species, including several species of wild cats. The desert cat is a cute small cat that lives in the desert and semi arid regions of India and is very rare to see nowadays. The cat is small and evades most of the camera traps and is active mostly in the night time. Being small, they hide in many places which makes them ever difficult to find and document. They are an important part of the ecosystem and represent the health of the desert ecosystem.

## Origin

Desert cats, also known as Sand Cats, are small wild cats that are native to the deserts of northern Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Central Asia. Their exact origin is unknown, but it is believed that they evolved from the African wildcat which is their closest relative.

As for how they reached India, it's possible that they expanded their range naturally over time, as they are known for their ability to adapt to different environments. Another possibility is that they were introduced to India by human activities, such as the trade and exchange of animals, or by being kept as pets and then escaping or being released into the wild. However, there is no concrete evidence to support either theory.

In any case, the desert cats of India are now considered to be a rare and endangered species, with a limited population that faces threats from habitat loss, hunting, and other human activities.

### Distribution and Population in India

Desert cats are considered to be a rare and elusive species,

and their distribution and population in India are not well documented. However, based on available information, it is believed that their population is limited and scattered in certain areas of the Thar Desert in northwestern India.

According to some reports, desert cats in India may also occur in other deserts and arid regions in the country, but this has not been confirmed. It is also possible that their range may have contracted in recent times due to habitat degradation and other threats.

Due to their elusive and rare nature, it is difficult to accurately estimate the population size of desert cats in India. However, it is believed to be small and declining, with some estimates putting the number at fewer than 500 individuals.

## Features

Desert cats are small wild cats that are well-adapted to life in harsh desert environments. They have a distinctive appearance that sets them apart from other wild cats. Desert cats have sandy-colored fur that helps them blend into their surroundings and provides excellent camouflage. They have large ears with black tufts at the tips, which help them hear prey and dissipate heat. They also have wide paws that are covered in fur to protect them from the hot sand, and large eyes that provide excellent vision in the dark. Desert cats are small in size, with an average weight of 3-4 kg (6-9 lbs) and a body length of 35-45 cm (14-18 inches). Desert cats are capable runners and can run at speeds of up to 50 km/hr (30 mph). There is no significant physical difference between male and female desert cats.

## Lifestyle

Desert cats are solitary and nocturnal animals, spending most

of their time alone and hunting at night. They are well adapted to the harsh desert environment and are able to conserve water and withstand extreme temperatures. Desert cats typically mate in the spring, with females giving birth to litters of 2-4 kittens after a gestation period of around 70 days. Desert cat kittens are born blind and helpless and are cared for by their mother until they are old enough to start hunting on their own, usually at around 3-4 months of age.

## **Food habits**

Desert cats are carnivores and feed on a variety of prey, including rodents, birds, reptiles, and insects. They are opportunistic hunters and will eat whatever prey is most readily available in their environment.

## **Habitat**

Desert cats are adapted to live in the desert and are most commonly found in arid regions with sandy or rocky terrain. They are able to tolerate extreme temperatures but prefer areas with cooler temperatures and adequate shade. They are also capable of surviving in areas with limited water, as they are able to conserve water and obtain moisture from their prey.

## **Vulnerable Species**

The Indian desert cat, also known as the desert wildcat, is considered vulnerable. It was listed as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2008.

The Indian desert cat is native to the arid regions of western and central India and is adapted to the harsh desert environment. However, it is facing a number of threats that have led to its vulnerability. These include habitat loss and fragmentation, persecution by local communities, and

interbreeding with domestic cats, which can dilute the gene pool and lead to genetic degradation. Additionally, the Indian desert cat is also hunted for its fur, which is used for trade in traditional medicine.

Conservation efforts are needed to ensure the survival of this species, including protecting its habitat and reducing its conflict with humans. The Indian desert cat is protected under the Indian Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which provides legal protection to the species and its habitat. However, effective implementation of the law is needed to ensure its survival.

## Protected Areas

Protected areas play an important role in conserving the Indian desert cat (*Felis silvestris ornata*) and its habitat.

Thar Desert Wildlife Sanctuary, located in the state of Rajasthan, this sanctuary covers an area of 3,162 square kilometers and is home to a variety of desert-adapted species, including the desert cat.

Great Indian Bustard Sanctuary, located in the state of Maharashtra, covers an area of 2,081 square kilometers and is known for its population of Great Indian bustards and desert cats.

Desert National Park located in the state of Rajasthan, covers an area of 3,162 square kilometers and is known for its unique desert ecosystem, which includes the Indian desert cat and other desert-adapted species.

Naliya Grasslands located in the state of Gujarat, these grasslands are known for their high diversity of wildlife, including the Indian desert cat.

Jaisamand Wildlife Sanctuary, located in the state of Rajasthan, covers an area of 201 square kilometers and is

known for its population of desert cats, as well as other wildlife species.

These protected areas provide a safe haven for the desert cat and its habitat and help to conserve the species and prevent it from becoming extinct.