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Abstract: Biological and ecological description of the cheetah. The species was probably already extinct in the Gulf region, where in the past it has been recorded in the area of Kuwait.

Fam. ~~Hyaenidae~~ (Hyaenas)

~~*Hyaena hyaena*~~

~~Striped hyaena~~

~~The Striped hyaena is unmistakable amongst Arabian carnivores on account of its striped coat, pronounced dorsal mane and heavy dog-like build with relatively low hind-quarters (Plate 4). The massive carnassial teeth and deep, narrow braincase are also characteristic. The specialised glandular pouch above the anus has led to the mistaken belief that the hyaena changes its sex annually.~~

~~It is a nocturnal animal, living in caves or earth dens and feeding largely on carrion. It has an unsavoury reputation for disinterring human corpses. Powerful teeth enable the hyaena to break up large bones. It is distributed across northern Africa and India, has been found near Safa in Summan and is certainly more widespread in the Gulf region than the few confirmed records suggest.~~

~~*Measurements:* total length 1450 mm; tail 295 mm; hind foot 220 mm; ear 150 mm; greatest length of skull 233-281.8 mm.~~

Fam. Felidae (Cats)

*Felis silvestris*

Wild cat

The Wild cat is small in size and can be distinguished externally from the equally small Sand cat, *Felis margarita*, by its smaller ears and absence of pronounced black elbow bars (Plate 7). The tympanic bullae are relatively small, about 18-23 mm in diameter. The general colour is tawny or ash-grey with an indistinct pattern on the body; the ears are rusty brown on their backs; the underside is whitish or buff.

The Wild cat is a nocturnal predator, feeding on small vertebrates as well as insects and favouring rocky habitats and bushy scrub country. It is an extremely agile climber. The Wild cat is widely distributed throughout Eurasia and Africa and in the Gulf it is unlikely to be as scarce as the few records suggest. A pale desert sub-species, *F. s. iraki*, is

known in the desert of Kuwait, while the darker sub-species *F. s. tristrami*, has been found at Dubai.

*Measurements:* total length 669-888 mm; tail 263-390 mm; hind foot 110.2-131 mm; ear 55-67 mm; greatest length of skull 82.7-99 mm.

*Felis margarita*

Sand cat

This is also a small species, but distinguishable from the Wild cat by its much larger ears and pronounced elbow bars (Plate 6). The soles of the feet are covered by long tufts of hair and the tympanic bullae are very large (25 mm or more in diameter). The colour is a very pale sand-yellow (with faint markings) on the upper body, the tail is ringed with black and the ear tips are also black while the underside and the feet are white.

The Sand cat is a mammal specially adapted for life in sandy deserts. The dense mat of hairs on the feet helps its grip when it is moving in the sand dunes. It digs a burrow in the sand to shelter from the intense heat and, like the Wild cat, it is a nocturnal hunter. It ranges from the deserts of North Africa through Arabia to Iran, Russian Turkestan and Baluchistan. The Arabian sub-species (*F. m. harrisoni*) is still known only in a few localities: one was found in eastern Saudi Arabia between As Sarrar and Al 'Uwaynah and it is also known to exist in the Qatar-Abu Dhabi frontier area.

*Measurements:* total length 702-740 mm; tail 250-300 mm; hind foot 110 mm; ear 57-68 mm; greatest length of skull 86.5-90.3 mm.

*Caracal caracal*

Caracal lynx

This is a medium-sized cat, at once distinguishable from other Arabian cats by its uniform reddish/sandy colour without any pattern on the body (Plate 7). Long black and white ear tufts are present in the adults and a prominent black spot can usually be seen above the eye.

The Caracal inhabits arid steppe and mountain terrain, where its sandy coat blends admirably with the rocky

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environment. It lives in rock crevices and caverns and is very secretive. It is a powerful and agile hunter with great jumping power and it has been credited with the ability to catch flying birds in its paws. It ranges widely from South Africa to India and in the Gulf region it has been found at Tawi Suwaihan, north-west of Buraimi.

*Measurements:* total length 857 mm; tail 227 mm; hind foot 157 mm; ear 74 mm; greatest length of skull 110.3–129.1 mm.

### *Panthera pardus*

### Leopard

This large and formidable cat has a distinctive pattern with the spots on its body forming hollow rosettes (Plate 8). Unlike that of the Cheetah, its face lacks the prominent black stripe extending from each eye to the mouth. The massive claws have complete sheaths. The Arabian subspecies *P.p. nimr* is small by comparison and the background colour between the spots is pale, almost white.

The Leopard is confined to mountains and hilly terrain. The damage it causes to domestic animal stocks and its occasional attacks on humans have rendered it a long-standing enemy of mankind. As a result of its secretive habits and choice of lairs in remote mountain fastnesses, it has fared better than the Cheetah in the struggle to survive in a hostile world. Nevertheless, in the Gulf region it is known only in the mountains of the Ras al-Khaimah peninsula. Elsewhere, the species has a wide range from Africa, through Arabia and Asia Minor, to the Caucasus, Iran and Turkestan, and eastwards to India and parts of the Far East.

*Measurements:* total length 1600–2007 mm; tail 660–814 mm; ear 44 mm; greatest length of skull 166.3–208 mm.

### *Acinonyx jubatus*

### Cheetah

The Cheetah is another large cat, distinguishable from the Leopard by the pattern of solid spots on the body and by the presence of a prominent black stripe from each eye to the mouth (Plate 8). In addition, the claws lack complete

sheaths. The long, slender limbs are well suited to the swift pursuit of prey, and this is the Cheetah's special skill.

Unlike the Leopard, it is an inhabitant of open plains, relying on its amazing speed over short distances to overtake and capture animals such as gazelles and hares. Distributed at one time from Africa, through Arabia, to Iran, Turkestan and India, it has now become very scarce in much of this territory and it may already be extinct in the Gulf region, where it has in the past been recorded in the area of Kuwait.

*Measurements:* Greatest length of skull 172 mm.

Two other species of mongoose have occurred in neighbouring parts of the peninsula: the White-tailed mongoose, *Ichneumia albicauda* (essentially an African species) occurs in Oman, and the small Indian mongoose, *Herpestes auropunctatus*, is found in Iraq. Two species of otter also occur in southern Iraq: the Common otter, *Lutra lutra*, and the Indian smooth-coated otter, *Lutra perspicillata*. These carnivores could possibly be found in the Gulf region.