

Asiatic golden cat

Catopuma temmincki

The Asiatic golden cat *Catopuma temmincki* is about two to three times the size of a domestic cat and looks similar to the African golden cat *Profelis aurata*, except that the Asian species is slightly heavier and the tail is proportionately longer (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002). Males are larger than females (Nowell & Jackson 1996). The most common coloration is fox-red to gold-brown, but it can also be dark brown, pale cinnamon, bright red, or grey with occasional melanistic forms (Ghimirey & Pal 2009). The pelt is usually quite uniform in colour, but there is a morph marked with a pattern similar to that of the ocelot (Fig. 1). This morph is found all over the Asiatic golden cat's range in China, and has been reported mainly from Sichuan and Tibet (subspecies *C. t. tristis*; Nowell & Jackson 1996). During a recent camera trapping study, the ocelot morph has also been detected in Bhutan (Wang 2007). In all morphs, the head is distinctly marked with white lines bordered with black running across each cheek and from the inner corner of each eye up to the crown. There are usually broad white cheek patches running from just below the eyes to the cheeks. Stripes run along the inner sides of the legs and dark spots are found on the chest and legs. The underside of the tail is white, especially the distal third of it, while the dorsal surface is brown with a black tip (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002). There are 3 subspecies in China: *C. t. bainsei*, *C. t. dominicanorum*, and *C. t. tristis* (Smith & Xie 2008).

Status and distribution

The Asiatic golden cat has a similar range to its close relative *Pardofelis marmorata*: from the Himalayan foothills into China and South-east Asia (IUCN 2010). It is found in parts of northeastern India, Tibet and Nepal (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002), as well as in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand (Nowell & Jackson 1996), Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam (Duckworth et al. 2005), on the Malaysian peninsula, and in Indonesia (Sumatra) (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002). There are studies suggesting it may be less common in montane forests (Holden 2001, Mishra et al. 2006), although it has been recorded at an elevation of 3,738 m in Bhutan (Wang 2007).

Little is known about the status of the Asiatic golden cat and it is rarely seen in the wild. However, there has been a recent increase in records from camera trapping studies (Suma-

tra; J. Sanderson, pers. comm.). Some studies have found more records of Asiatic golden cats than of some other sympatric small felids, suggesting it may be more common than previously thought (IUCN 2010). Nonetheless, population numbers are thought to be decreasing throughout its range, mainly due to habitat loss through deforestation (IUCN 2010).

The species is widely distributed in central and southeastern China (Fig. 2), ranging from the southeast China lowlands up to 3,170 m in northwestern Yunnan (Smith & Xie 2008). It also occurs in Sichuan, Tibet, east of Fukien and Gansu (Qiu & Bleisch 1996, Smith & Xie 2008, Feng, pers. comm.), and according to skin harvests also in Jianxi, Fujian and Hunnan (Nowell & Jackson 1996). According to the Red Data Book for China, total population numbers in China are estimated to range between 3000 and 5000 individuals (Wang 1998). There are no actual research projects on the Asiatic golden cat in China, but the species has been caught in camera trap pictures in monitoring sessions in Sichuan and Shaanxi in 2008/2009 (Fig. 1; Li et al. 2010).

Habitat

Asiatic golden cats are found in tropical and sub-tropical moist evergreen forest, mixed evergreen hill forest (Grassman et al. 2005) and dry deciduous forests (Nowell & Jackson 1996). They also occur in shrub land, grassland (Choudhury 2007) and open, rocky areas

(Sunquist & Sunquist 2002), and have been reported from an area of dwarf rhododendron and grassland at high elevations in Bhutan (Wang 2007).

Ecology and behaviour

There is little known about the Asiatic golden cat's ecology and behaviour. Information from two radio-collared individuals showed diurnal and crepuscular activity patterns and suggested that the species is not primarily nocturnal as previously thought (Grassman et al. 2005). According to locals, it hunts mostly on the ground, but is a good climber. It breeds in hollow trees and burrows in the ground (Smith & Xie 2008). A study in the Phu Khieo Wildlife Sanctuary, Thailand, showed home range sizes of 47.7km² for one male and 32.6km² for one female (convex polygon 95%; Grassman et al. 2005). Home range sizes are unknown for China.

Breeding behaviour is only known from captive animals. Litters are born throughout the year. The cats usually have one single kitten, with twins occurring occasionally and triplets being rare. Females attain sexual maturity at 18 (up to 24) months and males around 24 months (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002). Captive Asiatic golden cats have been recorded to live up to 20 years (Nowell & Jackson 1996).

Prey

A study in Malaysia showed that the Asiatic golden cat's diet was mainly composed of rodents such as rats and other murids, as well as snakes, lizards, birds and other medium-sized prey (Kawanishi & Sunquist 2008). Muntiac remains found in two scats of Asiatic golden cat



Fig. 1. There are two morphs of the Asiatic golden cat. The ocelot morph (left, Tangjiahe National Nature Reserve, Sichuan, October 2008) appears to be more common in China than the uniform morph (right, Changqing National Nature Reserve, Shaanxi, March 2009). Photos Sheng Li.

suggest that they may be capable of hunting mammals up to the size of small deer (Grassman 1998). Asiatic golden cats are also known to prey on poultry (J. McCarthy, pers. comm.).

In captivity

There are few Asiatic golden cats in zoos and the species does not appear to breed very well in captivity (Brocklehurst 1997). Since 1993, there has been an European Endangered Species Program (EEP) and a European studbook, held at the Heidelberg Zoo, Germany (EAZA 2009).

Main threats

The main threat to the Asiatic golden cat across its range is habitat loss, as southeast Asian forests are undergoing the world's fastest regional deforestation rates (IUCN 2010). With the increase of the human population in China, more and more forests are converted into agriculture and plantations, e.g. in Sichuan and Yunnan. Even though it is on the Protected Species List in China, the Asiatic golden cat has been hunted for its meat and fur. Large skin harvests have previously come from Jiangxi (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002). In the beginning of the 80s, 30 to 100 Asiatic golden cat and corsac fox pelts were collected annually in most counties of the loess plateau of Gansu (Anonymous 1989), but current numbers are unknown. Nowell (1990) disclosed fur smuggling from the Chinese mainland to Taiwan, and Chinese buyers often purchased skins and bones from neighbouring countries such as Myanmar, where Asiatic golden cats are often heavily hunted and are likely to be threatened (Shepherd & Nijman 2008). Another reported problem is persecution because of predation on poultry (IUCN 2010, J. McCarthy, pers. comm.).

Current and future protection

The Asiatic golden cat is fully protected over most of its range, except in Lao PDR, where hunting is regulated, and in Bhutan, where there is no legal protection (IUCN 2010). Hunting in China was prohibited in 1988 by the Law of Wildlife Protection (Nowell & Jackson 1996). However, there is still illegal trade in pelts and bones (Shepherd & Nijman 2008, IUCN 2010) and the enforcement of national and international protection laws to prevent hunting and poaching is necessary. The most important conservation measures to ensure the survival of the species include habitat protection and the connection of protected forest areas through corridors

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Fact Sheet

Names:

金猫 [jin mao]
Asiatic golden cat, golden cat, Temminck's cat

IUCN Red List:

Near Threatened (2008)

CITES:

Appendix I

Head and body length:

71-105 cm

Tail length:

40-56 cm

Weight:

7-16 kg

China Red List:

CR A3cd; C2a(i)

China Key List:

Class II

Global Population:

<10,000 (IUCN 2010)

Chinese Population:

3,000-5,000 (Wang 1998)

Distribution in China:

C to SE China



Photo A. Sitwa

(Traylor-Holzer et al. 2005). Scientific studies outside China include projects in Thailand's Phu Khieo National Park, and in the lowland rainforest areas of Taman Negara in Malaysia, where some camera trapping and radio tracking has been conducted (Grassman et al. 2005, 2006, Kawanishi & Sunquist 2008).

In China, the only Asiatic golden cat camera trap pictures are bycatches from other studies (e.g. a camera trap studies in giant panda reserves in the south of Shaanxi and in Sichuan; Li et al. 2010).

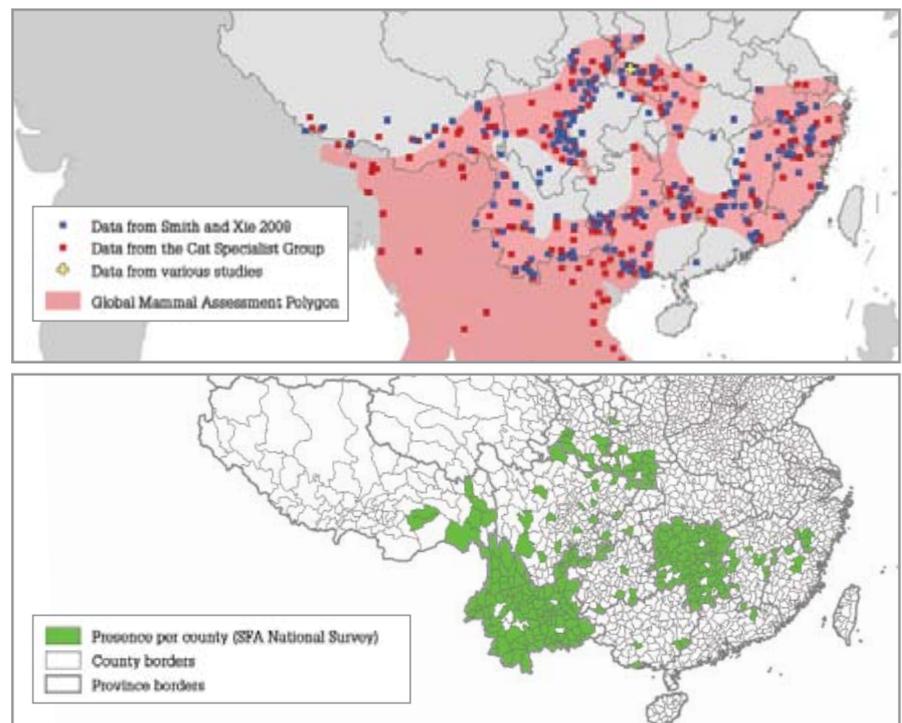


Fig. 2. Distribution of the Asiatic golden cat in China.