

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** AMAJH01030

**Data Sensitivity:** Yes

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Leopardus pardalis*  
**COMMON NAME:** Ocelot, Tigrillo, Painted leopard  
**SYNONYMS:** *Felis pardalis*  
**FAMILY:** Felidae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** 1758. Linnaeus, Syst. nat., ed. 10, 1:42. (*F. p. sonoriensis* 1925. Goldman, Jour. Mamm., 24:378, August 17).

**TYPE LOCALITY:** State of Veracruz (by restriction, J.A. Allen, Bull. Amer. Mus. Nat. Hist., 41:345, October 3, 1919). For *F. p. sonoriensis* type from Camoa, 800 ft., Rio Mayo, Sonora.

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** *Leopardus pardalis* is one of five species of *Leopardus* that occurs or thought to have once have occurred in Arizona. *Leopardus pardalis* contains five subspecies, with *L. p. sonoriensis* reported in Arizona and Sonora Mexico, and *L. p. albescens* in Texas and eastern Mexico.

**DESCRIPTION:** A medium-size, slim cat with body dimensions similar to the bobcat. Head and body 27-35 in (69-89 cm); tail 13-15 in. (33-38 cm); wt. 20-40 lb. (9-18 kg). Females are slightly smaller than males. Spotted cat with a long tail that does not have the rosettes of the jaguar. Tail is about one half the length of the head and body. Ground colors of its upper parts are grayish to cinnamon. Dark markings forming chainlike streaks, generally forming black-bordered elongated spots (more nearly stripes than spots), which run obliquely down sides. Head with small black spots and two black stripes on each cheek; 4-5 parallel black stripes on neck. The backs of the rounded ears are black with a white central spot. Ground color of sides paler than dorsum; under-parts and inner surfaces of limbs whitish, and tail above marked with dark bars and blotches. Eye-shine is golden. The skull is similar to that of the bobcat but larger. Skull with elongated brainbox and prominent sagittal crest; braincase narrow across postorbital constriction; nasals long; skull has 30 teeth. There are 4 mammae.

Cahalane (1961) states that "no ocelot is exactly like another. The color of different individuals of one species, even in the same neighborhood, varies greatly, all the way from

ruddy yellow to grayish. No coat patterns are exactly alike. One side of an ocelot doesn't match its other side. The lines, spots and rings run in a crazy pattern."

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** Margay (*Felis wiedi*) is smaller, with similar coloration and markings; has longer tail, longer than hind leg. Jaguar (*Felis onca*) is much larger and marked almost entirely with rosettes. Tracks are similar to Bobcat's (*Lynx rufus*), but slightly larger and wider: 2-2 1/2" (50-62 mm) long, about equally wide and with forefoot larger than hind foot.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:** Color drawing (Burt and Grossenheider: plate 8, 1976)  
Color photo (Whitaker, Jr.: plate 268, 1996)  
Color photo (Warren *in*  
[http://www.digimorph.org/specimes/Leopardus\\_pardalis/leopardus.jpg](http://www.digimorph.org/specimes/Leopardus_pardalis/leopardus.jpg))  
Color photos (*In*  
[http://216.239.37.104/translate\\_c?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://lynx.uio.no/catfo lk/ocelot01.htm&...](http://216.239.37.104/translate_c?hl=en&sl=es&u=http://lynx.uio.no/catfo lk/ocelot01.htm&...))  
Color photo (Wilson 1999)

**TOTAL RANGE:** Present: eastern and western lowlands of Mexico, from southern Mexico (including the Yucatan Peninsula) through Central America, and in the lowland areas of Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru. On the fringes of its range, they occupy a very limited region in both the United States (remnant populations in southern Texas, and transient populations in southeastern Arizona) and Argentina.

Historic: extended from Arkansas and Arizona to Paraguay, Uruguay, and northern Argentina. They also occurred in eastern, central, and southern Texas, and possibly Louisiana.

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Southeastern Arizona (Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise counties). Brown (1985 in Harwell and Siminski 1986 draft) believes that the ocelot may be repeating the northward expansion of the javelina, coati-mundi, and other neo-tropical invaders into the San Pedro River Valley, Arizona. This may be a good possibility with the establishment of the TNC (The Nature Conservancy) San Pedro River Preserve, and the BLM (Bureau of Land Management) San Pedro River Natural Conservation Area.

## **SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** Ocelots are generally nocturnal, although it is not uncommon to see them during the day. They spend their days lying quietly in the branches of large trees and come out to hunt after dark. Though normally solitary, they frequently travel and hunt in pairs, probably as mates, maintaining contact and signaling each other with meows like those of domestic cats. Ocelots are good climbers and inhabit forested or brushy areas. They swim well, and often hunt along streams. Texas studies suggest home ranges of about one square mile, although this may vary due to prey abundance. Because of their mild manner, they are easily trapped or shot, and is therefore the most frequently hunted cat in Latin America.

**REPRODUCTION:** Minimum breeding age for females has been estimated to vary from 10 to 11 months in captives, to 18 months in captive and wild ocelots. Gestation is estimated at 70-80 days, with most births occurring in September through January. Usually two young born, almost hairless with eyes closed, in a nest (lined with grass or other materials) within a rocky den, hollow log or an especially dense thicket. A female ocelot raises her young without any help from the male. When young are about two months old, they begin to accompany the mother on hunting forays. They remain dependent on her for meals for several months.

**FOOD HABITS:** Diet changes with the season, but consists mainly of small to medium-sized mammals, birds, rabbits, reptiles and amphibians. They are also known to eat insects, land crabs, fish, armadillos, lesser anteaters, squirrel monkeys, and land tortoises. Ocelots hunt both on the ground and in trees, sometimes even catching birds perched in trees.

**HABITAT:** A tropical animal of humid habitats, in its northern range the ocelot occurs in subtropical thorn forest, thorn scrub and dense brushy thickets, often in riparian bottomland. Also likes rocky areas. The critical habitat component is probably dense cover near the ground, while completely avoiding open country. The Ocelot is more adaptable than the Jaguar and may persist in partly cleared forests, dense cover near large towns, second growth woodland, and abandoned cultivation, which have gone back to bush.

**ELEVATION:** Below 4,000 ft (1,200 m)

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** In Texas, ocelots occur in the dense thorny chaparral of the Rio Grande valley, with dominant species consisting of mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*), *Acacia* spp., *Condalia* spp., granjeno (*Celtis pallida*), cenizo (*Leucophyllum texanum*), and white brush (*Aloysia texana*) (in M. Tewes and D. Schmidly).

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Estimates largely unavailable throughout its range, but thought to be rare and threatened in many parts of its range.

## **SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:** LE (USDI, FWS 1982)  
**STATE STATUS:** WC (AGFD, WSCA in prep)  
[State Endangered AGFD, TNW 1988]  
**OTHER STATUS:**

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Habitat destruction from agriculture, ranching and development, trapping, and poaching has brought this cat to endangered status. All these factors need to be taken into consideration when managing for this species.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:** Hunting is prohibited in many the U.S. as well as many South American countries. However, hunting is allowed in Peru and there is no legal protection in Ecuador, El Salvador, and Guyana.

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:** Determine home range area and food habits; estimate abundance and current range; protect suitable habitat from degradation.

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** USFS, BLM, Private.

## **SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

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#### MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

*Felis* = cat, from Latin; *pardalis* = leopard-like, from Greek. Common name derived from Indian word for jaguar. Tigrillo is Spanish for small tiger.

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