



Felis silvestris

Common name: **Wildcat**Latin name: **Felis silvestris**Local name: **كديس الخلاء**

ECOLOGY

Type:

Wild

Role in Ecosystem:

As predators, African wildcats hunt small animals, controlling population numbers and therefore help conserve vegetation.

HABITAT

The wildcat is widely distributed from Mauritania to the Horn of Africa, Sudan and Ethiopia. It is found in many habitats from deserts, semi deserts, savannahs, scrub grassland to open forests in hilly and rocky terrain as well as in mixed forests.



Food

Carnivore

African Wildcats prey on mice and rats, and also feed on birds and arthropods, as well as hares, rabbits and even baby antelopes. They are prey for larger predators in their environment, like birds of prey and jackals.



Movement and Communication

To communicate with neighbors and with members of the opposite sex, the African wildcat marks with urine, droppings, and tree scratching.



Social Habits

Solitary

Wildcats are solitary hunters, though pairs or family groups sometimes hunt together. Males only join females that are in heat otherwise they remain solitary. Males maintain territories that they mark and defend while females form colonies to cooperatively nurse and raise their young.



Reproduction

Viviparous

African wildcats breed throughout the year, but the timing varies among regions. After a 56 to 65-day pregnancy, the female gives birth to between 1 – 8 kittens in a den, which can be a burrow abandoned by other animals, or under rocks and dense vegetation.

The young stay with the mother until they are about two months old, and reach sexual maturity at 9-12 months.



Attributes



Appearance:

The African Wildcat is similar in appearance to domestic cat, but has proportionately longer legs and a long thin, tapering tail. When sitting upright, their long legs cause the body to be in an almost vertical position.

The color varies between light sandy grey, and sometimes with a pale yellow or reddish with a lighter underside. The feet are dark brown and its fur has slightly darker stripes.

Length:

Head and body: 45-80 cm (17-31")

Tail: 24.1-36.8 cm (9.4-14")

Weight:

3-8 kg (6-18 lbs)

Life Span:

12-16 years

INTRODUCTION

The wildcat is a small mammal found all over the world, and is thought to be the ancestor of house cats, domesticated around 10,000 years ago.

Its size and appearance is similar to house cats, with slightly longer legs.

In Sudan, they are a common animal, and as with house cats, is associated with local superstitions.

LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

Human interaction

Despite the beneficial role of cats in controlling the number of pests infesting crops and homes, such as mice, rats, snakes and scorpions, they may also prey on domesticated animals such as pigeons, chicken and rabbits. Therefore, their relationship with humans varies between welcoming and hostile.

Cats remain close to human settlements because they provide a source of food, yet their aloof nature only adds to their unfriendly reputation.

Cultural value

Cats are closely tied with superstition in Sudan. For example, it is widely believed that cats are associated with *jinn*, due to their intense eyes and aloof behaviour.

There is a local myth that twins turn into cats at night.

Cultural expression

.Ghab ab shinab, li'ib ab dhanab

This expression is used when the absence of figures of authority (the cat in this instance), leads to the prevalence .chaos and disorder (the mouse)

بيننا ما بين الكديس و الفار

Lit.: (Our relationship) is like that of the cat and the (mouse)

A metaphor for an unsalvagable, hostile relationship

THREATS

Small wildcats around the world are threatened by numerous factors, including habitat loss, hunting, and interbreeding. Feral domestic cats compete with wildcats for prey and habitat. Wildcats can also suffer from diseases transmitted by domestic cats. Wildcats are also killed by vehicles, as bycatches of predator control measures, or by rodenticides.

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