

The IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group's website (www.catsg.org) presents each month a different cat conservation project. Members of the Cat Specialist Group are encouraged to submit a short description of interesting projects. For application use this [standardised form](#) (an editable word document)



Wild Cats of Brazil Project / Projeto Gatos do Mato - Brasil

Project Wild Cats of Brazil is a large scale multidisciplinary effort to study Brazilian felids. It started recently as a project on the biology, distribution and conservation status of the little spotted cat (*Leopardus tigrinus*), that joined together all researchers conducting field work with the species throughout Brazil. This small cat is currently the main focus, but the project greatly expanded to include all other felids in all Brazilian biomes.

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Neotropical felids are among the least known in the world, with very limited information available regarding their ecology and conservation. Some of them are under a series of threats and threatened with extinction in varying degrees in several parts of their range. This project intends to change this scenario aiming the most varied aspects of the species' ecology and conservation, necessary for their long-term survival and management. As such, the scope is very broad including studies on home range, habitat use, food habits, distribution, reintroduction, genetic makeup, estimates of abundance, reproductive biology, diseases, livestock depredation, threats and conservation status. Some topics are of a pioneer nature, such as the verification of re-introduction of captive-born animals as a management tool towards the conservation of small felids, which has never been done.

Map of Brazilian biomes showing the location of current study areas



Objectives:

- . Conduct ecologic (telemetry) studies to determine home range, activity patterns, food habits, habitat use, daily movements, etc. of the smaller species;
- . Evaluate the potential for re-introduction of captive born or raised individuals as a management tool for the conservation of small felids;
- . Assess the geographic distribution range and genetic makeup of the populations of the little spotted cat;
- . Verify the occurrence of hybrids with other Neotropical felids, within the populations of little spotted cat/Pampas cat/Geoffroy's cat;
- . Assess species community composition and density estimates for all Brazilian biomes

Blood sample of eastern-Amazonian specimen of little spotted cat being collected for genetic / epidemiological studies

- . Understand the basic issues of the smaller species' reproductive biology;
- . Identify diseases affecting wild and captive populations;
- . Determine the main threats and the conservation status for the different areas of Brazil.

Wild Cats of Brazil, as an umbrella multidisciplinary project, involves more than 22 professionals of more than 10 institutions from north to south. Ecological data on species community composition and abundance estimates are being gathered from camera trapping studies using locally made cameras (two of the models developed by team members), which proved to be highly effective with a cost/benefit ratio much better than traditional brands. Data on home range, movement, daily activity patterns comes from radio-telemetry (with some also from camera-trapping), diet from scat analysis. Genetic studies focus on determining significant evolutionary units of little spotted cat and occurrence of hybrids. Distribution records combine those of museum collections with field observations, whereas reproductive biology information is being collected from zoo specimens. To evaluate the viability of captive raised smaller felids as a management tool for re-introduction programs, animals under study are being adapted for release in the wild thorough predatory training. Animals considered apt will be released and monitored to evaluate this as a future tool for conservation of wild smaller felids. Procedures follow those recommended by IUCN/SSC/Re-introduction Specialist Group. Threats evaluation assesses the intensity of each factor through the percentage of the area under impact. Conservation status evaluation combines all information gathered from natural populations.



Tadeu Gomes de Oliveirs placing Brazilian made camera-traps in the savannas of northern Brazil



Daylight camera trap picture of little spotted cat in Brazil



Margay M1 being studied in a farmland area of southernmost Brazil

The first preliminary findings are coming out. Some have been/are being recently published on Cat News. Little spotted cat presence in the Amazon basin has been confirmed, unravelling the myth of its presence there. So far there are more than 214 localities in all eco-regions except for the pampas of the little spotted cat only in Brazil, with range evaluation including all other countries. We have just discovered a population of pampas cat in an area considerably out of its current known range. Scat collection for diet study is considerably large (>500 samples each) for some areas. The first camera-trapping results are also proving interesting, with preliminary density estimates for little spotted cat, margay, Geoffroy's cat, ocelot, and possibly jaguarundi. Community composition is also proving interesting. We theorize that ocelot/?jaguar numbers might affect those of little spotted cat. Camera-trapping is also providing information on the little known cats' habitat use and activity patterns, while we wait for telemetry data. Findings on the predatory training of

captive raised specimens are also quite interesting, with a far better response than expected. As the days go by and as findings are coming out, project actions and participation are increasing, aiming to answer some of the many questions on the natural history of the little known Neotropical felids.

Duration: Started 2004 - is still ongoing

Location (see map): 15 study sites in all Brazilian biomes

Sponsor(s): Brazil's National Environmental Fund - FNMA

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