
Keywords: 4CN/Chinese mountain cat/Felis bieti/Sichuan province/status

Abstract: In an effort to locate free-ranging *Felis bieti*, the so-called Chinese mountain cat, we undertook an expedition to Ganzi Prefecture in western Sichuan Province, China. We searched skin shops, interviewed former hunters, and local pastoralists to determine the existence of this little-known small felid. We found five skins of *F. bieti* for sale in three towns along our route. Former hunters and townspeople we interviewed were either unfamiliar or confused regarding the cat's existence. Local pastoralists provided excellent information however. *F. bieti* is restricted to high elevation steppe grassland and does not occur in true desert or heavily forested mountains. Perhaps *F. bieti* should henceforth be commonly referred to as the Chinese steppe cat. A better understanding of the ecology, behavior, and threats to *F. bieti* is needed.
In an effort to locate free-ranging *Felis bieti*, the so-called Chinese mountain cat, we undertook an expedition to Ganzi Prefecture in western Sichuan Province, China. We searched skin shops, interviewed former hunters, and local pastoralists to determine the existence of this little-known small felid. We found five skins of *F. bieti* for sale in three towns along our route. Former hunters and townspeople we interviewed were either unfamiliar or confused regarding the cat’s existence. Local pastoralists provided excellent information however. *F. bieti* is restricted to high elevation steppe grassland and does not occur in true desert or heavily forested mountains. Perhaps *F. bieti* should henceforth be commonly referred to as the Chinese steppe cat. A better understanding of the ecology, behavior, and threats to *F. bieti* is needed.

Results and Discussion
Most local Tibetan pastoralists quickly confirmed *F. bieti*’s presence. In one instance, a villager in Daofu suggested that the Pallas cat and the Chinese mountain cat were the same species. A local Tibetan female pastoralist soundly rejected this suggestion, insisting the Pallas cat was not present and that, in thre towns: Kangding, Tagong and Luhuo. Skins are bought by the shopkeepers for about 80 Yuan (US$10) and then sold at a profit to tourists. We were offered skins at 400 Yuan, but after bargaining an agreeable price of 120 – 200 Yuan was reached.

Using Peng (2002) we asked interviewees to select the pictures of the cats that occurred in the region. Their choices were snow leopard, clouded leopard, jungle cat, lynx, golden cat, Chinese mountain cat, and Pallas cat. Though hunters and townspeople were either unfamiliar or confused regarding the cat’s existence, local pastoralists provided excellent information.

Fig. 1. Two Chinese mountain cat skins obtained from small shops in western Sichuan (Photo Nima Chen).

Fig. 2. The habitat of the Chinese mountain cat above Banda village (31° 32’ 25.3” N, 00° 30’ 47.6” E, elevation 3833 m) is typical of high elevation grasslands used for grazing domestic yaks (Photo J. Sanderson).
fact, the Chinese mountain cat occurred near her village. Like others, she pointed out the tufts on the ears, dark bands on the tail and blond/brown coat as distinctive features. All pastoralists that confirmed the existence of *F. bieti* told us that the cat was restricted to high elevation steppe grassland, did not occur in mountain forests, and was nocturnal. Some people said the cat feeds on rodents. In towns and villages west of Kangding local pastoralists could identify the Chinese mountain cat and skins were found for sale in local markets.

The winter fur of *F. bieti* is used to make traditional hats. The cat is taken in winter for two reasons: the cat is in its rich winter coat, and track following is easiest in snow. Tracks of the cat are followed to its day den in caves or in holes such as beneath trees. Poison meat is placed at the den entrance. In the morning the tracks are followed to the ailing or dead cat. Snare traps are also set at the den entrance.

One local pastoralist, Drola, took us to his home on the mountain above Bangda village where he grazed his yak herd. From Peng (2002) his wife quickly confirmed the presence of *F. bieti*. She then offered to sell us a hat made from *F. bieti* fur. Drola offered to show us the habitat of *F. bieti* so we hiked the trail up the mountain slopes to 3833m where he apparently had taken the cat near a large rock outcrop. He suggested that rock outcrops were often present where the cat was found (Fig. 2).

At least three lines of reasoning suggest that the *F. bieti*’s common name should more accurately be the Chinese alpine steppe cat, or Chinese steppe cat. Though the geographic distribution of *F. bieti* was given by He et al. (2004), it is widely appreciated that the cat does not occur everywhere throughout this range. The heart of the geographic range, the region around Qinghai Lake, elevation 3200m, in Qinghai Province, is Central Tibetan Plateau Alpine Steppe, one of World Wildlife Fund’s 867 ecoregions. Second, every herdsman that confirmed the existence of *F. bieti* said that the cat occurred in grasslands and not in heavily forested habitats. Thirdly, the Chinese name for the cat, “huang mo mao” means “cat that occurs in wilderness of little vegetation.” Two common names have been used: Chinese desert cat, a reference to little vegetation, and Chinese mountain cat, referring appropriately to its high elevation occurrence. High elevation grasslands are in fact alpine steppe.

As we traveled west from Kangding the rugged topography of the greater Hengduan Mountains gave way to increasing expanses of steppe suggesting that the *F. bieti* is more common in western Ganzi Prefecture than near Kangding, at the eastern margin of the Tibetan Plateau.

**Physical description**

There are five shared characteristics in the skins we saw, three of which have been accurately portrayed in drawings. All skins we saw had hair that was gray closest to the skin, turning abruptly to brown, and ending with blond tips. The ear tufts are distinctive and ob-

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**Table 1.** Towns and villages where skins were found for sale and where local pastoralists could identify the Chinese mountain cat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Skins for sale</th>
<th>Identification by local people</th>
<th>Latitude</th>
<th>Longitude</th>
<th>Elevation (m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kangding</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>30.05° N</td>
<td>101.96° E</td>
<td>2530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagong</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>30.32° N</td>
<td>101.53° E</td>
<td>3700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daofu</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>30.98° N</td>
<td>101.12° E</td>
<td>2900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luhuo</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>31.40° N</td>
<td>100.68° E</td>
<td>3200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangda</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>31.53° N</td>
<td>100.52° E</td>
<td>3833</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spatial Ecology of Geoffroy’s Cat in the Pampas

Mauro Lucherini¹, Claudia Manfredi, Lucía Soler, Estela Luengos Vidal, Diego Castillo, Emma B. Casanave

The Geoffroy’s cat Oncifelis geoffroyi is a small-sized felid found from sea level up to 3,300 m in the Andes and from southern Bolivia, northwestern Argentina, southern Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay to southern Patagonia and Chile (Sunquist & Sunquist, 2002). It has recently been updated to the Near Threatened category (Nowell, 2002), because of lack of knowledge and concerns for the impact of human-related habitat changes upon its populations. While cat research has increased in Argentina in the last decade (Lucherini et al., 2004), the only published information on the spatial behaviour of this cat comes from the southernmost portion of its distribution in Chile (Johnson & Franklin, 1991).

We report here a summary of the first results of two radiotelemetry studies initiated in 2000 in the Pampas grasslands of Buenos Aires province, Argentina.

In early 2000 (Lucherini et al., 2000), five Geoffroy’s cats (Table 1) were captured and radiocollared at Campos del Tuyú Wildlife Reserve – CdT – (a protected area created by Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina). From 1999 to 2004, we captured 11 individuals at Ernesto Tornquist Provincial Park – PPET – (Table 1, Fig. 1), but only tagged five of them and collected a total of almost 550 radio-locations until the moment.

In both areas, Geoffroy’s cats were strictly nocturnal, with an activity peak in the middle of the night (Luengos Vidal et al., 2003, for PPET). At CdT, both sexes most frequently used natural grasslands, both during nocturnal activity and for resting in the day, while small woodland patches were important as marking sites. At PPET, cats used both natural and highly modified farmland areas, but they appeared to use patches with high and dense vegetative cover more than expected. Home ranges (estimated through the 100% Minimum Convex Polygon) ranged from 1.3 to 6.4 km² (mean = 4 km², n = 8) and tended to be smaller at PPET than CdT. At both sites, male home ranges tended to be larger than those of females and each male’s range overlapped the smaller ranges of one or more females. Surprisingly, at CdT, home range overlap was more extensive between males than females.

These preliminary results suggest that the socio-spatial system of

References


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