

# Introduction

China is a land of cats. Almost a third of the 37 living cat species worldwide occur in the Peoples' Republic of China (Table 1). This richness is no surprise considering the size and the diversity of the country. China stretches over 9.6 million square kilometres, from the Turfan depression 154 metres below sea level to the peak of the Qomolangma at 8,848 metres. Ecological regions include tropical rainforest in the southeast to boreal forest in the north, grass steppe in the northeast to sand deserts in the west and high alpine zones in the southwest. And in all these distinct habitat types, we can find felid species, from the mighty tiger *Panthera tigris* in the southern and northern forests to the mysterious manul *Otocolobus manul* in the open steppe to the splendid snow leopard in the Himalayas. For some species like the snow leopard *Panthera uncia* or the clouded leopard *Neofelis nebulosa*, the Chinese part is the most significant of their global range, the Chinese mountain cat *Felis bieti* is even endemic to the country, whereas the presence of the fishing cat *Prionailurus viverrinus* is questionable (Fig. 1). China is important for the conservation of the cats, and the cats are important for nature conservation in China, because they are living symbols of China's biological and ecological diversity.

But China is also the most populated country in the world, and the cats need to share all living space with many people who have, in the course of a very old culture, brought the use of nature to perfection. Today, China is the world's fastest growing economy, and this brings new challenges, but also opportunities for the conservation of the indigenous fauna. Habitat destruction, the traditional consumptive use of cats, and the increasing fragmentation of the landscape through modern transport infrastructure are among the threats to the survival of wildlife in China. But the fast development also brings opportunities: as a

consequence of urbanisation and rural exodus, some regions, e. g. in the mountains of south China, are experiencing habitat recovery. Vast reforestation programmes help to restore the forest, new laws protect wildlife and their habitats (Lu 2010, this issue). Over 2,000 protected areas of various categories are today recognised in China, protecting 14.4–18 % of the country's land area (Smith & Xie 2008); numerous of these areas have been established since 1980, many since 1995. The increasing wealth of Chinese society not only provides more financial capacity for nature conservation projects, but it also boosts the interest of Chinese citizens in wildlife and nature conservation.

Firm conservation must stand on at least three legs: reliable information, effective legislation, and high awareness. Increased scientific and public knowledge is indeed needed for the effective conservation of the felids in China. The largest of all cats, the tiger, is an outstanding cultural symbol in China and has received attention from scientists, conservationists and the broad public for a long time (Luo 2010, this issue), and another charismatic large cat, the snow leopard, has experienced increasing interest in recent years (Riordan & Shi, this issue); but most other cat species have so far been largely ignored. There is a clear need for more surveys, better monitoring, and genuine research on cats in China.

For the project "Cats in China", the Wildlife Management Division of the Department of Wildlife Conservation of the Chinese State Forestry Administration, the National Wildlife Research and Development Center, and the IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group have collaborated to compile the present knowledge in order to produce a basic document on the cat species in China, with the aim of promoting more research on cats. In a workshop at the annual

**Table 1.** Cat species occurring in the PR of China and IUCN Red List categories of the respective species.

Scientific name	English name	Chinese name	IUCN Red List
<i>Catopuma temmincki</i>	Asiatic golden cat	金猫 [jin mao]	NT
<i>Felis bieti</i>	Chinese mountain cat	荒漠猫 [whong mo mao]	VU C2a(ii)
<i>Felis chaus</i>	Jungle cat	丛林猫 [cong lin mao]	LC
<i>Felis silvestris</i>	Wild cat	草原斑猫 [cao yuan ban mao], 野猫 [ye mao]	LC
<i>Lynx lynx</i>	Eurasian lynx	猞猁 [she li]	LC
<i>Neofelis nebulosa</i>	Clouded leopard	云豹 [yun bao]	VU C1+2a(i)
<i>Otocolobus manul</i>	Pallas's cat, manul	兔狲 [tu sun]	NT
<i>Panthera uncia</i>	Snow leopard	雪豹 [xue bao]	EN C1
<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Leopard	豹 [bao], 金钱豹 [jin qian bao], 文豹 [wen bao]	NT
<i>Panthera tigris</i>	Tiger	虎 [hu], 老虎 [lao hu]	EN A2bcd+4bcd; C1+2a(i)
<i>Pardofelis marmorata</i>	Marbled cat	云猫 [yun mao]	VU C1+2a(i)
<i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	Leopard cat	豹猫 [bao mao]	LC
<i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>	Fishing cat	渔猫 [yu mao]	EN A2cd+4cd

congress of the Society for Conservation Biology in July 2009 in Beijing, cat experts from China and abroad have helped us to review and complete the available information. Some twenty senior and junior cat conservationists shared their experiences and opinions about the status of the 13 cat species in China. The discussion revealed that there was much enthusiasm, but, especially for the medium-sized and smaller felids, very little expert knowledge. In this Special Issue of Cat News on Cats in China, we present an overview of the state of knowledge of cats in China, in the hope of raising awareness for cat conservation in China at a national and international level and promote more baseline surveys and research. The distribution maps presented in the species accounts are based on four different sources: (1) point distribution from the China Species Information Service as presented in Smith & Xie (2008), (2) distribution polygons based on the Global Mammal Assessment (IUCN et al. 2008), (3) point distribution maps from the database of the Cat Specialist Group, and (4) raster maps produced from the county-based National Wildlife Survey performed by the State Forestry Administration from 1995 to 2005. All these datasets have their inherent methodological biases, and all may include information that is no longer valid today. Considering this, we did not try to merge these datasets, but rather present them separately, in order to help identify priority areas for further survey work.

At the SCB congress workshop in Beijing, Chinese and foreign scientists discussed cat conservation with young

Chinese colleagues and students. These young scientists have shown a great interest in ecological research on cats. Cats are beautiful and fascinating animals that can easily catch the interest and the love not only of scientists, but of a broader public, too. They are therefore ideal flagship species for the conservation of habitats and of entire ecosystems.

We hope that this issue on cats in China is the start of more cat conservation work and a fruitful cooperation between institutions and individuals dedicated to nature conservation in China. We would like to thank all scientific colleagues who helped us to realise this project, either by providing information, or as authors or reviewers of chapters of this issue of Cat News. We especially acknowledge the financial support of the Swiss-based organisations Zürcher Tierschutz, Animal Trust, and the Wildcat Club.

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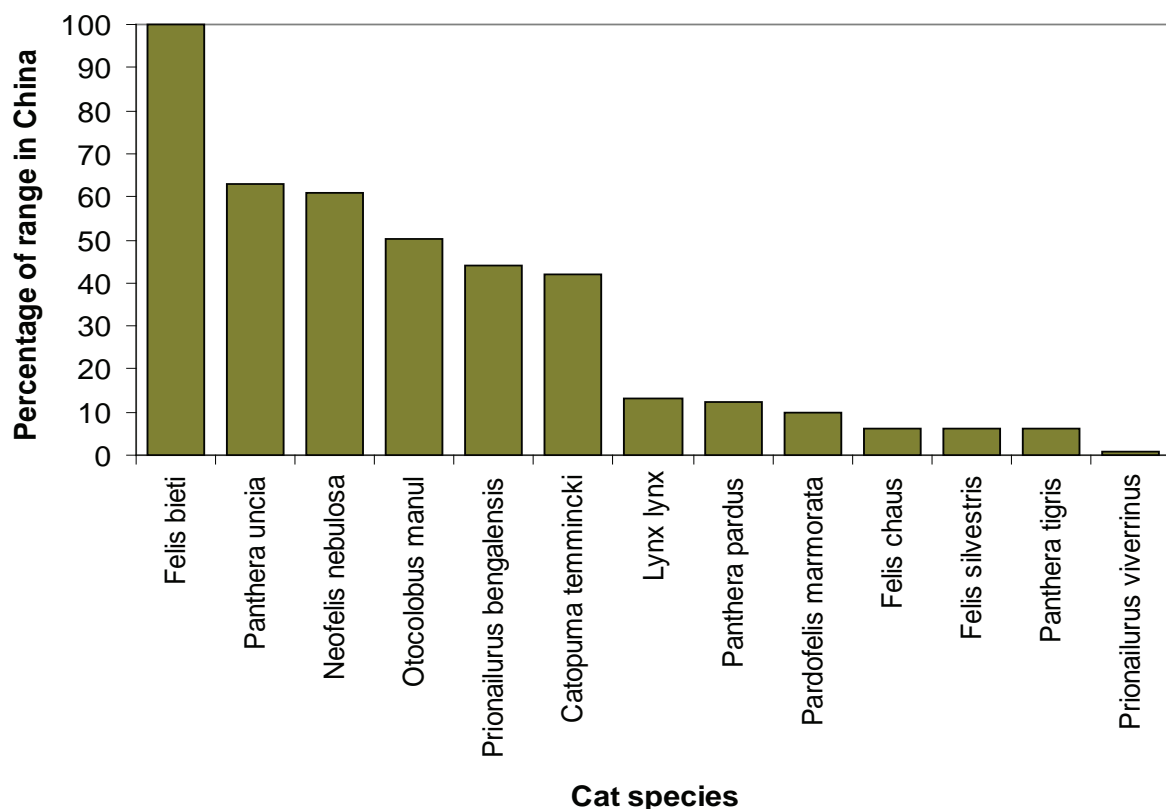
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**Fig. 1.** Chinese distribution range as percentage of the global area of cat species according to the Global Mammal Assessment (IUCN et al. 2008).