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Leopardus wiedii

Description

Leopardus wiedii, commonly called margays, is a species that resemble a house cat with a coat similar to that of a leopard. Their fur is tan to cinnamon in color, is thick and soft with rows of irregularly shaped, dark brown spots and a white underside (de Oliveira 1998, Eisenberg and Redford 1999, Nowak 1999). Their size ranges from 46 to 79 centimeters from head to tail with tails ranging from 30 to 50 centimeters in length (de Oliveira 1998, Eisenberg and Redford 1999, Nowak 1999). *L. wiedii* can weigh anywhere from 2.6 to 3.9 kilograms, being slightly larger than the size of a house cat (de Oliveira 1998, Eisenberg and Redford 1999, Nowak 1999). *L. wiedii* are known for their prowess and great ability to climb trees. They are capable of hind-leg reversal, can suspend themselves during descent much like a squirrel, and can descend trees head first, a trait unique to only a few feline species (Azevedo 1996, de Oliveira 1998, Nowak 1999).

Ecology

L. weidii are predators in their communities, feeding on a variety of mammals, birds and their eggs, amphibians, reptiles, and non-insect arthropods, sometimes also

preying on livestock such as chickens (de Oliveira 1998, Nowak 1999). While being carnivorous, they can also feed on fruits (de Oliveira 1998, Nowak 1999). Their climbing ability allows them to eat not only prey on the ground but also reach ones that live up in trees. *L. weidii* are active during the day and night time and can communicate to each other through odors or touch, though they are mostly asocial (Azevedo 1996, de Oliveira 1998, Nowak 1999).

Data on the reproduction behaviors of *L. weidii* has only come from captive breeding (Azevedo 1996, Mansard 1997, Nowak 1999). Though mostly anti-social, *L. weidii* can form temporary bonds with a mate during breeding season and have an average of two offspring per female though all information comes from captive breeding (Azevedo 1996, de Oliveira 1998, Nowak 1999). Females can reproduce as young as one year old (Azevedo 1996, Mansard 1997, Nowak 1999). Their young are altricial, only being able to eat solid foods after 8 weeks of age after nursing (Azevedo 1996, Mansard 1997, Nowak 1999). They can live, on average, up to thirteen years in the wild and to the age of twenty on average in captivity (International Society for Endangered Cats 2013a).

Current and Historic Range

L. weidii occur in Central and South America ranging from Mexico to northern Argentina and Uruguay along riverine forest (de Oliveira 1998, Nowak 1999). Sightings have ranged from sea level to 1,500 meters above in the Andes, but rarely above 3,000 meters (Oliveira 1994). Populations exist in Central America, northern, and southern

South America come from three different lineages of *L. wiedii*, with the Amazon River being identified as the cause of the differences between northern and southern South America populations (Eizirik et al. 1998). Most *L. wiedii* live in tropical and subtropical forests while some have been found in more disturbed areas (Nowell and Jackson 1996). Their home range can vary from 15 to 43 square kilometers and live from sea level up to 1,500 meters in elevation though there have been rare sightings at around 3,000 meters above sea level (Azevedo 1996, de Oliveira 1998, Nowak 1999). *L. wiedii* is more vulnerable than its sister species, *Leopardis pardalis*, to habitat loss and fragmentation caused by humans because they are more exclusive to living in forested areas (de Oliveira 1998, Nowell and Jackson 1996).

Legal Status

L. wiedii currently are rare and endangered all throughout their range, mainly due to habitat loss and being hunted illegally for their fur, used to trade (Payan et. Al 2008). Population numbers are also expected to be lower where ocelots occur because of competition between these species (Oliveira et al. in submission). *L. wiedii* species is listed as “Near Threatened” but is close to becoming listed as “Vulnerable” on the IUCN Red List and is now considered “Endangered” on the US Federal List of Endangered Species (Krakauer 2002). Hunting has been significantly decreased by international protection but still continues illegally in local areas (de Oliveira 1998, Nowell and Jackson 1996). Populations are predicted to decline at a rate below 30% over the next 18 years, or three generations (Payan et. Al 2008). The deforestation of the Amazon by

roads, development, and fires is predicted to fragment remaining populations even further over the next ten years and populations in areas outside of the Amazon are not expected to survive at all (Payan et. Al 2008).

Conservation Efforts

Conservation of *L. wiedii* have only been done through legal protection of lands within their range and through captive breeding. Not much else was found on this topic.



Full body image of a margay in captivity (Javi the Frog 2013)



Current range of *L. wiedii* (International Society for Endangered Cats 2013)

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