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## OCELOT FACT SHEET



**KINGDOM:**  
Animalia

**PHYLUM:**  
Chordata

**CLASS:**  
Mammalia

**ORDER:**  
Carnivora

**FAMILY:**  
Felidae

**GENUS:**  
Leopardus

**SPECIES:**  
*L. pardalis*

The ocelot (*Leopardus pardalis*, previously *Felis pardalis*, from Latin *pardalis*, "leopard-like") is a wild cat distributed over South and Central America and Mexico. Its northernmost occurrence is Texas. It also occurs on the island of Trinidad in the West Indies.

It is up to 100 cm (3'2") in length, plus 45 cm (1'6") tail length, and weighs 10-15 kg (about 20-33 pounds). While similar in appearance to the oncilla and the margay, who inhabit the same region, the ocelot is larger.

The ocelot is mostly nocturnal and very territorial. They will fight fiercely, sometimes to the death, in territorial disputes.

Like most felines, they are solitary, usually meeting only to mate. However, during the day they rest in trees or other dense foliage, and will occasionally share their spot with another

ocelot of the same gender. When mating, the female will find a den in a cave in a rocky bluff, a hollow tree, or a dense (preferably thorny) thicket. The gestation period is estimated to be 70 days. Generally the female will have 2-4 cubs, born in the autumn with their eyes closed and a thin covering of hair.

Ocelots typically breed only once every other year, although the female may mate again shortly after losing a litter. Mating can occur at any time of year, and estrus lasts from seven to ten days. The small litter size and relative infrequency of breeding make the ocelot particularly vulnerable to population loss.

Compared with other small cats, ocelot kittens grow quite slowly. They weigh around 250 grams (8.8 oz) at birth, and do not open their eyes for fifteen to eighteen days. They begin to leave the den at three months, but remain with their mother for up to two years, before dispersing to establish their own territory. Ocelots live for up to twenty years.

While ocelots are well equipped for an arboreal lifestyle, and will sometimes take to the trees, they are mostly terrestrial. Prey includes almost any small animal: monkeys, snakes, rodents, fish, amphibians and birds are common prey, as are small domestic animals such as baby pigs and poultry. Almost all of the prey that the ocelot hunts is far smaller than it is. Studies suggest that they follow and find prey via odor trails, but ocelots also have very keen vision; including, as their large dark eyes would suggest, night vision.

The ocelot's fur resembles that of a jaguar; it was once regarded as particularly valuable, and because it was so popular the ocelot remains one of the best known of the small wildcats. Several hundreds of thousands of ocelots were killed for their fur; therefore this cat is now an endangered species in many countries, although the IUCN lists them as "Least Concern".

Ocelots once inhabited the chaparral thickets of the Gulf coast in south and eastern Texas, and were found in Arizona. In the United States, they now range only in several small areas of dense thicket in South Texas. The ocelot's continued presence in the U.S. is questionable, due largely to the introduction of dogs, the loss of habitat, and the introduction of highways. Young male ocelots are frequently killed by cars during their search for a territory.

Like many wild cats, it is occasionally kept as a pet. Ocelots belong in their natural habitat and not in the hands of private individuals as "pets." By their very nature, these animals are wild and potentially dangerous and, as such, do not adjust well to a captive environment. Exotic animals do not make good companions. They require special care, housing, diet, and maintenance that the average person cannot provide. When in the hands of private individuals the animals suffer due to poor care. They also pose safety and health risks to their possessors and any person coming into contact with them.

Individuals possessing exotic animals often attempt to change the nature of the animal rather than the nature of the care provided. Such tactics include confinement in small barren enclosures, chaining, beating "into submission," or even painful mutilations, such as declawing and tooth removal.

If and when the individual realizes he/she can no longer care for an exotic pet, he/she usually turns to zoos and other institutions such as sanctuaries to relieve him/her of the responsibility. However, all the zoos and accredited institutions could not possibly accommodate the number of unwanted exotic animals. Consequently, the majority of these animals are euthanized, abandoned, or doomed to live in deplorable conditions.

Every year, a variety of sources provides millions of animals to the exotic pet trade. Animals are captured from their native habitat and transported to various countries to be sold as pets. Others are surplus animals from zoos or their offspring. Backyard breeders also supply exotic animals.

The sellers of these animals, however, make no mention of the state or local laws regulating private possession of exotics, or of the dangers, difficulties, physical and physiological needs of the animals they peddle. The suffering of the animals in the hands of unqualified and hapless buyers appears to be of no concern in the lucrative exotic pet trade.

Non-domesticated felines are cute and cuddly when they are young but have the potential to kill or seriously injure people and other animals as they grow. Even a seemingly friendly and loving animal can attack unsuspecting individuals. Many non-domesticated cats have escaped from their cages and terrorized communities. Several of these incidents have resulted in either serious injury to the persons who came in contact with the animal, or the death of the animal, or both.

While zoos and aquariums may appear to be educational and conservation-oriented, most are designed with the needs and desires of the visitors in mind, not the needs of the animals. Many animals in zoos and aquariums exhibit abnormal behavior as a result of being deprived of their natural environments and social structures. Some zoos and aquariums do rescue some animals and work to save endangered species, but most animals in zoos were either captured from the wild or bred in captivity for the purpose of public display, not species protection. The vast majority of captive-bred animals will never be returned to the wild. When the facility breeds too many animals they become "surplus" and often are sold to laboratories, traveling shows, shooting ranches, or to private individuals who may be unqualified to care for them.