

Snow Leopard

This iconic cat lives in the unbelievably cold habitats of alpine and subalpine areas Central Asia and is rarely ever seen in the wild based in part because of its elusive nature and in part because there are so few left in the world. The estimated population of this endangered species is somewhere between 4,000 and 6,500 individuals.



Fishing Cat



The fishing cat is a species that proves not all cats hate water, but in fact some *love* the water. These cats live along rivers and in mangrove swamps in Asia, primarily in India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. They are skilled swimmers, and are dependent on wetlands for their food. However, human exploitation of fish stocks as well as development of their habitat has had negative effects on the species and they are listed as endangered.

Conservation photographer Morgan Heim has been working on a project titled **Cat In Water**, which documents the lives of this amazing species, as well as the threats it faces for survival.

Iberian Lynx

The Iberian Lynx is critically endangered, and is the world's most threatened species of cat with only about 309 living in the wild as of 2013. That is actually up from the roughly 100 individuals estimated to be alive in 2005. Native to the Iberian Peninsula, the Iberian lynx is an expert rabbit hunter -- unfortunately it has specialized on only rabbits and the loss of prey due to disease outbreaks as well as habitat has all but wiped it out. Though it is now illegal to hunt them and their habitat is protected, the lynx still falls victim to cars along roads, feral dogs and poaching by humans.



Flat-Headed Cat



This unusual species is perhaps one of the **least-known felid species in the world**. It is native to Borneo, Sumatra and the Thai-Malay Peninsula. The Flat-Headed Cat is one of the smaller species of wild cat, and lives among wetlands. It is listed endangered, with fewer than 2,500 mature individuals left in the wild, and the loss of the species is due primarily to the destruction of the wetlands on which they depend. Like the fishing cats, this species is great at catching fish and have even been seen washing objects in the same way that raccoons do. But, the loss of habitat -- mostly do to conversion into palm oil plantations -- may mean it will disappear along with the forest.

Bornean bay cat

This is the Bay Cat, and it may disappear from the planet before we even learn anything about it.

This, like the flat-headed cat, is not a well-studied species and researchers know very little about it. Indeed, it wasn't even photographed until 1998! The Bay cat is found only in Borneo, and is quickly disappearing due to the deforestation of its habitat for commercial logging and oil palm plantations. Only an estimated 2,500 of these cats exist, and the population is in decline. This may be a species that remains a mystery until it disappears.



Tiger

Tigers are perhaps the most iconic cat species in the world, next to the African lion, and one of the most loved animal species worldwide. And yet, despite the respect, admiration and fear it inspires, it is endangered and disappearing from the wild at a rapid clip. There are six subspecies of tiger, including the more familiar Sumatran Tiger and Bengal Tiger, and some are more threatened than others. But the tiger as a species is in danger everywhere. Threats include a loss of habitat, but also they are hunted for their skins, and for parts of their bodies used as pain killers and aphrodisiacs (though there is zero scientific evidence that any part of a tiger has any medicinal properties).



Though protected through CITES, the black market trade in tigers (both alive and in pieces) is thriving. Today, the captive tiger populations for several subspecies outnumber the wild populations. Without more stringent protections and better enforcement, these big cats may disappear from the wild entirely.

Andean Cat

We go from the huge tiger to the tiny wild cat that looks like it could be a house cat! This is the Andean Cat, and before 1998, the only evidence scientists had that it existed at all was two photographs. This small mountain cat is so similar in habitat and appearance -- preferring high altitudes and its body shape and coloring -- that it is considered the tiny version of the snow leopard. But unlike the snow leopard, there is far less conservation funding to help this cat. The **Andean Cat Alliance** and the **Small Cat Conservation Alliance** are the two groups mainly helping this felid species. Fewer than 2,500 are thought to exist today, with a declining population due to a loss of habitat and prey, and due to hunting for traditional ceremonial purposes.



Clouded Leopard

The Clouded Leopard has been in the news recently because it has been **declared extinct in its native Taiwan**. After over a decade of searching, researchers couldn't find a shred of evidence that the cat still lives in the country. Thankfully, the species still exists in other areas of Southeast Asia, though total numbers are estimated to be less than 10,000. Because of this, they have been listed as vulnerable to extinction (not endangered, but close to it), since 2008. The main threats against them, of course, are human-made -- habitat loss from large-scale deforestation, and commercial poaching for the wildlife trade.



African Lion



You wouldn't think the king of the jungle would be in danger of disappearing but indeed, even this most iconic animal, the African Lion, is listed as vulnerable to extinction. Thankfully, it is not yet endangered but it is rapidly approaching that status. Because of habitat loss and conflict with humans, most lions are now found in eastern and southern Africa, with their numbers in serious decline. Between 30-50% of lions have been lost in the last two decades alone, and there are now only around 47,000 (at the very highest estimates) still living in the wild. Conservation groups are working to not only preserve habitat so that lions have enough room to hunt and roam, but also to provide people with tools and knowledge for how to coexist with these big cats and reduce the number of deaths due to snaring. Hopefully we can keep this cat from making it onto the endangered species list.

Marbled Cat

This is the Marbled Cat. Native to South and Southeast Asia, it has been listed as vulnerable to extinction since 2002 with fewer than 10,000 mature individuals left in the world. It is about the size of a house cat and is a tree dweller where it hunts birds, squirrels and reptiles. It is considered sort of a miniature version of the clouded leopard.

However, it is often victim to snaring by humans, as its bones, meat and fur are valued. Thankfully, hunting it is prohibited in many countries which may help to slow its decline -- but only if deforestation is slowed as well. A loss of habitat is a serious threat to this arboreal species.



Could this little guy be any cuter?? Or be any more easily mistakable for a house cat? But be assured, this is a very wild cat -- and also one that is vulnerable to extinction. The Blackfooted Cat is the smallest African cat, and is endemic in the south west arid zone of southern Africa. These cats are strictly nocturnal, and hide at the slightest disturbance, and so are hardly ever seen. They are most unusual in that they almost never climb trees, but instead find shelter by digging burrows. They are also known for being incredibly fierce if cornered -- they would give lions and tigers a real run for their money if there weren't such a size difference. Though it is not persecuted by farmers, its cousin the African wildcat is, and so falling victim to poisons and traps set for other animals -- including the poisoning of carcasses to control jackals - is the most significant threat to this tiny species.

Blackfooted Cat



Cheetah



It is the world's fastest land animal -- but it still can't outrun the impacts of humans on its environment. The Cheetah has been listed as vulnerable to extinction, and has disappeared entirely from many of its former ranges. Once found throughout Africa and the Middle East, the cheetah is now primarily relegated to one small patch in Iran and fragmented areas of Africa. For thousands of years, cheetahs were tamed as hunting animals and pets, and some kings or emperors would keep a thousand cheetahs at a time. But because cheetahs need large stretches of open land to be able to hunt, the impact of human encroachment, as well as hunting by humans for their furs, has taken its toll. Only around 12,400 cheetahs remain in the wild in twenty-five African countries, and cheetahs may be well on their way to the endangered species list.