

Black-Footed Cat

Scientific Name: *Felis nigripes*

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Felidae



This is a small cat distinguished from the wildcat by size, bold markings, and ears the color of the body (never reddish). Head and body length averages 15 inches, tail length about 7 inches, and weight about 3.5 pounds. The legs are relatively long, and the head is wide with large, rounded ears. Coloration ranges from cinnamon-buff in the south to tawny in northern populations, heavily spotted and barred. There are 3 broad transverse bars on the upper limbs and narrow, shorter bars on lower limbs. The undersides of the feet are black (hence the name). Four black bands from the head or nape extend onto the back and flanks, and the tail is spotted with a black tip. The underparts are pale with a white chin, chest and insides of thighs.

Range

Southwest arid zone in Botswana, Namibia and the Karroo south of the Orange River

Habitat

Open country with cover in the form of scrub, bushes and clumps of grass

Gestation

63 to 68 days

Litter

1-3

Behavior

By day the Black-footed Cat lies up in disused burrows or in termite-mound ventilation shafts. The arid country it inhabits is mostly waterless, but it will drink occasionally when rainwater pools are present. It is solitary and territorial. It is nocturnal, and so shy that it hides at the slightest disturbance. It has the reputation of being more intractable and antisocial in captivity than any other cat. Even kittens taken before their eyes open and hand-reared make defensive threats and retreat to dark corners, or attempt to attack their owners. Skill and persistence in digging suggest that they dig for insects, spiders and other subterranean prey.

Reproduction

Estrus lasts only about 36 hours. A female will accept copulation for a period of only 5 to 10 hours, during which a pair mates up to six times. Kittens are more mature at birth than wildcats, and develop faster. Their eyes open at 6 to 8 days; they leave the nest at 4 weeks, start eating solid food at 5 weeks, and capture prey (mice) at 6 weeks. A captive mother kept her kittens from leaving the nest until they were 3 weeks old, but later actually hauled kittens reluctant to leave out by the nape. She tried to move the nest site every 6 to 10 days.

Wild Diet

Small rodents, insects, ground birds and lizards