

Pardofelis marmorata

No image

Common name: Marbled cat

Local name: Marbel biral (Bengali: Bangladesh, India), Shih mao, Shihban mao, Xiao yunbao (Chinese), Kucing batu (Indonesia), Kucing dahan (Malaysia), Kyaung tha lin (Myanmar), Maew laey hin on (Thailand)

Classification:

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Family: Felidae

Genus: *Pardofelis*

Species: *marmorata*

Profile:

A miniature version of the clouded leopard, the marbled cat is slightly larger than the domestic cat, with a total body length of about 45-62 cm where the tail length is alone 35-55 cm. It has a shoulder height of about 28 cm and weighs around 2-5 kg. The tail is extremely long (three-quarters of the body length), bushy and aids the animal in balancing. The marbled cat has thick soft fur with a base colour ranging from pale yellow to brownish grey with lighter undersides. The coat is patterned like a clouded leopard, except that the patches on the body have pale borders unlike the black-edged markings of the clouded leopard. The patterns are smaller than in the clouded leopard and they merge together resembling a marble, hence the name. The legs and tail have numerous black spots. It has long canines similar to a clouded leopard, but the skull is shorter and rounder. The face has two well defined cheek stripes that extend from the corner of each eye and jut back over the forehead. The eyes are amber or golden in colour and the ears are short and rounded and black with grey bars marking them. A complete bony ring surrounds the eye socket, which is very unusual in felids. The anterior upper pre-molar is absent or vestigial. The animals have webbed toes and double claw sheaths, enabling them to completely retract their claws. The marbled cat has two subspecies, the *Pardofelis marmorata marmorata* found in southeast tropical Asia, and the *Pardofelis marmorata charltoni* found in Nepal. The animal has never been studied properly because of its extremely shy and secretive nature. Therefore, very little information exists about the animal from the wild. The marbled cat holds great ecological significance from the genetic and evolutionary point of view as it is intermediate between the small and big cats.

Lifespan: At least 12 years and 3 months (in captivity)

Distribution: The marbled cat is forest-dependant and is primarily associated with moist and mixed deciduous-evergreen tropical forest though it may also prefer hill forests. Some sightings have also occurred in secondary forests, clearings, and logged forests. It has been found from the sea level up to 3000 m altitude. The marbled cat is found in the forests of India (in the eastern Himalayan foothills), Nepal, China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Sumatra and Borneo. Its occurrence is uncertain in Bangladesh.

Population: Less than 10,000 mature individuals (IUCN) (Figures are for wild population only)

Behaviour: Very little information is available about the behaviour of marbled cats as they are extremely shy and elusive creatures. Although previously they were believed to be nocturnal, recent studies suggest that they may be cathemeral i.e. active during both day and night. It is observed to exhibit both arboreal and terrestrial habits. The morphological adaptation of the body parts, especially the legs and the tail, helps the cat to climb on trees and hunt. Like most other cats, territory-related attacks are prevalent among the marbled cat family as well, leading to injury and even death sometimes. Not much is known about the animal's reproductive cycle except what has been observed in captivity. There appears to be no fixed breeding season. In captivity, estrus has been reported to occur almost monthly. Kittens have mottled brown coats and the typical marble patterns appear after four months.

They open their eyes after 14-16 days and are able to walk by 22 days. The kitten's coat is of mottled brown colouration and develops the distinct marble pattern at 4 months age.

- **Diet:** Marbled cats are carnivores and feed primarily on birds and rodents like squirrels and rats. Their diet also includes lizards, frogs, insects and fruit bats. Their morphology suggests that they may primarily have arboreal feeding habits. In Borneo however, they are believed to be primarily terrestrial.
- **Reproduction:** Breeding season: No fixed season; Gestation period: 66-82 days; Litter size: 2 (average); Weaning: 121 days; Sexual maturity: 21 months (both male and females)

Current status:

- **Status:**
 1. IUCN 2008: Vulnerable
 2. CITES 2008: Listed in Appendix I
- **Threats:**
 1. Habitat loss and destruction due to logging, human settlements, shifting cultivation and plantations (According to FAO, its habitat in southeast Asia is undergoing the world's fastest deforestation rate of 1.2-1.3% a year since 1990)
 2. Poaching for illegal wildlife trade in skins, bones and meat.
 3. Retaliatory killing by humans because of poultry depredation.
- **Conservation practices:**
 1. Hunting marbled cats is prohibited in India, China, Nepal, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Malaysia.
 2. Hunting regulations exist in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Singapore.
 3. The range of this species falls within many protected areas.
 4. The species is listed as endangered in the US federal list.