

## Grey Wild Cat—Yaalboskat

*Felis ocreata* Gmelin<sup>1</sup>

## FELIS OCREATA CAFFRA.

*Felis caffra* Desmarest, 1822, Mamm. Suppl., p. 540.

Type (in the Paris Museum) from South Africa (the Cape ?).

The following names have been given to further supposed local races.

## FELIS OCREATA NAMAQUANA.

*Felis ocreata namaquana* Thomas, 1926, Ann. Mag. N.H. (9), xvii, p. 180.

Type (in the British Museum) from Berseba, Great Namaqualad.

## FELIS OCREATA XANTHELLA.

*Felis ocreata xanthella* Thomas, 1926, P.Z.S., i, pp. 291-92.

Type (in the British Museum) from Ukualukasi, Ovamboland.

## FELIS OCREATA GRISELDA.

*Felis ocreata griselda* Thomas, 1926, Ann. Mag. N.H. (9), xvii, p. 180.

Type (in the British Museum) from "South of Dombe Grande," Benguela, Angola.

## FELIS OCREATA VERNAYI.

*Felis ocreata vernayi* Roberts, 1932, Ann. Transvaal Mus., vol. xv (I), p. 6.

Type (in the Transvaal Museum) from Tsotsoroga Pan, N. Bechuanaland.

## NATIVE NAMES:

## PERSONALLY COLLECTED

Herero: *Óchwi*, *Óchawhi*. Ovambo: *Osichwi*.Bechuana: *Pháxe*, *Pháhē*; *Tíwi* (Gobabis Dist.).Ovadirico, Ovacuangari, Mambakushu: *Sinóno*.Berg Damara, Hei||kum Bushman, Nama Hottentot: */Hōab*.||K'au||en & !Kung Bushmen: */Nōa*.Naron Bushman: */Nōaba*.

## OTHER SOURCES

Bechuana: *Phage* (Zukowsky). *Tebe* (England).Sikololo: *Sinono* (Lancaster & Belme).Chinkoya: *Kapaka wa muli shaka* ? (Lancaster).Chilavale: *Muswi* (Lancaster). *Kaonde*: *Kapaka* (Lancaster).Chila: *Kaze* (Lancaster—probably also the Domestic Species).Tonga: *Simulinkuku*, *Nole* (Lancaster).Nama Hottentot: */Hōas* (Krönlein).||K'au||en Bushman: */Nwa* (Bleek).!Kung Bushman: */Nua* (Bleek).Naron Bushman: */Nwaba* (Bleek).<sup>1</sup> 1791, Bruce, Reis. Afrika, 2, Anhang, pp. 27-79; from Ras el Feel, Abyssinia.

Sikwengo (Hukwe) Bushman: *Umu* (Balme); *Go* (Zukowsky).

/Nu|en Bushman: ⦿ *O*: (Bleek).

Masarwa (Kakia) Bushman: ||*Naa*, ⦿ *Po*: (Bleek).

/Auni Bushman: ⦿ *Po:o* (Bleek).

||Ng!ke Bushman: ⦿ *Mwa* (Bleek).

/Kam-kalke Bushman: ||*Gwatn* (Bleek).

!Olkung Bushman (Central Angola): ‡*Noe* (Bleek).

**DISTRIBUTION IN SOUTH-WEST AFRICA.**—This Cat is plentiful throughout South-West Africa and the Caprivi. Even in the Namib Coastal Desert Belt it may be met with wherever rock or dry river-bed scrub occurs. It is particularly numerous in the northern and eastern sand-plains.

**DISTRIBUTION OUTSIDE SOUTH-WEST AFRICA.**—The Grey Cat has a very extensive distribution over Africa, from the Cape to Uganda, Somaliland, Abyssinia, Nubia, Egypt, Tripoli and Algeria.

It extends across the Suez Canal into South-Western Asia (Sinai, Palestine, Syria, and Arabia). It is also found in Sardinia (Lataste, 1885).

**HABITS.**—The Grey or Kaffir Cat is solitary in habit, and may be met with in any kind of country, whether level or mountainous, afforested or open. It prefers situations where there is plenty of dense bush, long grass, reed, or rock cover, and is often found at considerable distance from water. According to Wilhelm, however, it appears to drink regularly. It usually lies up above ground or under the shelter of piled up rocks and loose boulders. Grant found it sleeping by day in hollow trees. In undisturbed areas, when the weather is cool or cloudy, it often moves about and hunts during the daytime. Like other wild cats this species preys on birds, up to the size of the largest game birds, hares, and the young of small antelope. It also kills and devours small rodents, snakes, lizards, tortoises, and large insects ("beetles"—Grant).

In farming districts it is a persistent poultry thief, and occasionally destroys immature small stock.

"They sometimes attack the young of sheep and goats."—Wilhelm.

Although readily caught in freshly baited traps—unlike leopards, but in common with other small *Felidæ*—this species is not often attracted by carrion. The Grey Cat is a more strongly-built animal than the average Domestic Cat and, when cornered by a dog, can give an extremely good account of itself. These wild cats are particularly savage when caught in a trap, and are liable to charge if approached incautiously.

Although as a rule comparatively silent, the sounds made during the mating period are not unlike those of ordinary domestic cats.

A considerable amount of interbreeding takes place between males of wild and females of domestic cats in South Africa. Semi-wild hybrids are often very numerous in the neighbourhood of farms and native villages; and unsuspected strains of wild blood may account for domestic cats being apt to run wild in the country districts of South Africa.

"The first generation of a cross between *ocreata* and a domestic cat has

definitely half-breed characteristics, the next generation appears to revert to typical *ocreata*, or nondescript domestic."—Pitman.

Encounters are said to take place frequently between the 'Toms' of domestic and wild cats, in which the former as a rule come off badly.

This species is difficult to tame, while even hybrids with domestic cats seldom allow themselves to be handled.

Like other wild *Felidæ*, this cat has an unpleasant smell which appears to be mainly due to its breath.

"A European Wild Cat (*F. silvestris*) has been known to live 16 years in captivity. Domestic Cats may be alive and well when 13 years old, but 14 to 15 years is their ordinary extreme age. A cat which lived to 21, when it died, had lost all its teeth."—Flower.

**BREEDING HABITS.**—The average number in a litter is two or three, more rarely four or five.

Two kittens not more than a week old (Kovares,—Kaakoveld, 31st March) were found in a shallow depression at the base of some rocks. As a rule they breed inside the holes of burrowing animals or in rock crevices.

"Litters of three and four were found breeding between October and December."—Wilhelm.

"Kittens of *F. ocreata* are very difficult to rear in captivity."—Haagner.

"Average period of gestation (all cats), 56 days."—Wilhelm.

**DESCRIPTIVE NOTES.**—Partially albino wild cats are not infrequent in South Africa, but a percentage of these may derive from hybridisation with the domestic species. There are semi-albino specimens in the Kaffrarian and Albany Museums.

Allen (1924, Bull. Am. Mus. N.H., vol. xlvii (III), p. 278) describes one of three albinistic specimens from the Congo as having a diffused whiteness everywhere, giving a whitish effect to the dorsal aspect, all the limbs and the ventral area being creamy white.

When at bay the 'ruff' round the neck is often erected, giving the animal a somewhat lynx-like appearance.

Weight (♂) 8½ lb. (Flower).

Shoulder height, 30-36 cm. approx. (Wilhelm).