

Serval

Leptailurus serval

Kingdom Aniamalia
Phylum Chordata
Class Mammalia
Order Carnivora
Family Felidae

Native to: Africa



Status: Least Concern
(Endangered outside Northern Africa)

The main threat to serval populations is the loss and degradation of wetland and grassland habitat. Also, pelts and skins are still traded in large numbers in some African countries. Hunting is prohibited or regulated in some African countries under the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Appearance & Lifespan

The serval is one of several species of medium-sized African wild cats and weighs 10-20 kg (22-44 lb). It has a slender body with long legs, a short tail and large oval ears that are positioned closely together on the head. The serval has a long neck and its back legs are longer than its front legs which make it seem very tall.

The serval's coat is a tawny or sandy to reddish brown color with bold, dark spots that merge into stripes along the back. The back of the serval's ears are broadly banded black and white, and this, along with its defining stripes provides the cat with excellent camouflage and allow it to go virtually unseen in tall grasses and brush cover.

The serval's body is approximately 85 cm in length (33.5"), standing 50 cm tall (19.7") at the shoulder. The average lifespan of a serval is 12-20 years.



Behavior & Reproduction

Servals will usually have 1-5 kittens, twice a year. They are born mainly in the wet seasons after a gestation period of 74 days. The mother will raise her young alone and must leave them often to hunt, leaving them defenseless against predators and making the survival of all the kittens highly unlikely.

When male cubs are old enough to fend for themselves the mother will drive them away. The female young will stay with the mother until they are sexually mature before they are also driven away to establish their own territories.

The serval is mostly nocturnal and solitary, having a territory of up to 13 km² (5 mi²). Both male and female servals will mark their territory boundaries by spraying urine continually to ward off other intruding servals.

Ecology & Conservation

The serval is found throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but is rarely found in the arid desert region of the Sahara, the western tip of South Africa or areas of the tropical rainforest belt of Central Africa. They exist in wet, savanna long-grass areas and thrive along riverbanks.

Servals eat a diet of ground-squirrels, hyraxes, snakes, lizards, mole rats, frogs, and insects. It usually only eats fresh meat, but will resort to eating carrion under severe conditions. They are able to echolocate in the long grasses using their long pointed ears in order to find food.

Here at the zoo the serval's diet includes a specially formulated feline diet that is provided by the Toronto Zoo, assorted beef organs, beef bones, pork hock and on occasion, venison.

Several regional populations of servals have been designated by different organizations at varying levels of threat. Servals north of the Sahara have been assessed regionally as being **Critically Endangered**; they are an isolated group with less than 250 mature individuals.

Did You Know?

1. The pattern on every serval's coat is unique to that animal, like a human's finger prints or a zebra's stripes.
2. Servals have many different vocalizations including snarling, growling, spitting, purring, and a high-pitched cry specifically used for calling other servals.
3. Servals are highly crepuscular which means they are active at sunset and sunrise.

