

Short Communication

Further records of the Sand Cat, *Felis margarita*, from the eastern desert, Jordan

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The Sand Cat, *Felis margarita*, was recorded from Jordan based on an observation made by Mountfort (1965) in Wadi Rum during the Second Jordan International Expedition. Later, its presence was substantiated in Wadi Rum by finding a skull (Hemmer, 1978). Bunaian et al. (1998; 2001) reported a specimen around Qasr Burqu. It is currently considered rare, probably due to its largely nocturnal lifestyle and secretive habits, however it may well be more widespread than what records suggested.

Little is known about its habitat requirements and habits. The Sand Cat prefers sand deserts, inter-dune gravel flats, gravel/rocky and even volcanic lava fields and depressions without Acacia. It feeds primarily on small desert rodents, and to a lesser extent birds, reptiles and insects (Abbadı 1991; Bunaian et al. 1998; Cunningham, 2002). *Felis margarita* is a strictly nocturnal species; with most sightings between 00:00 and 06:00h (Ahmed et al., 2016). In Palestine, it was estimated that males have a territory of about 16 km² (Abbadı, 1991).

On 4.12.2016, while RSCN rangers were patrolling on a night shift near Abu Al Safa Dam (32.680393 N 38.115185 E), they encountered a Sand Cat at around 1 am (Fig. 1). The area enjoys lush vegetation with abundance of rodent burrows. Within the past two years, the Sand Cat was encountered by the RSCN rangers on several occasions around Burqu'a, east Al Rihsa, Lawrence Dam and Al Jua'baa N Burqu'a (Fig. 2).

It seems that the Sand Cat is common in the eastern desert of Jordan, and it coexists with other carnivores within the vicinity of Burqu'a including the Caracal, *Caracal caracal*, the Red Fox, *Vulpes vulpes*, the Sand Fox, *Vulpes rueppellii*, and the Striped Hyena, *Hyaena hyaena* (Amr, 2012).

The Sand Cat is listed as least concern in the in IUCN red list and in Appendix II of CITES. The Burqu'a area is currently identified as a proposed protected area. The Sand Cat can be considered as a key species for this proposed protected area. Further monitoring should be conducted to explore more about the biology of this illusive species.



Figure 1. Sand Cat spotted in Abu Al Safa Dam © Nader Al-Gheiath

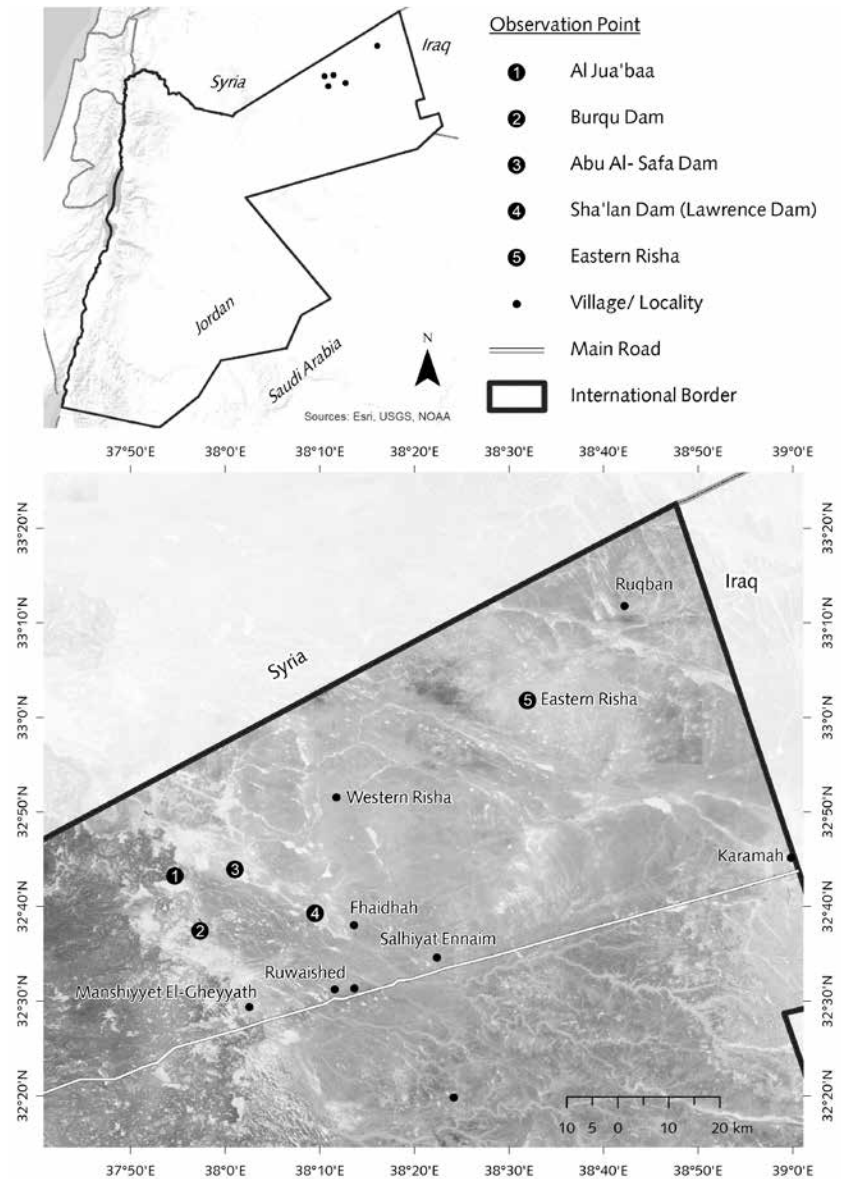


Figure 2. Sand Cat records at the eastern desert of Jordan.

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