

Pampas cat into Pampas cats & why it matters

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Date: Sunday, March 13, 2022, 04:39 PM GMT-3



Splitting the Pampas cat group and why it matters

Jim Sanderson

The many morphs exhibited by the Pampas cat confused and confounded experts of the Felidæ for two centuries. For instance, *Felis colocola* (Molina, 1782) from Chile, *Felis pajeros* (Desmarest, 1816) from Argentina, *Felis braccata* (Cope, 1889) from central Brazil, *Felis pajeros crucina* (Thomas, 1901) from southern Argentina, *Felis (Lynchailurus) colocola neumayeri* (Matschie, 1912) from Mata Grosso, Brazil, *Lynchailurus pajeros garleppi* (Matschie, 1912) from Quito, Peru, *Felis pajeros thomasi* (Lönnerberg, 1913) from Ecuador, *Lynchailurus pajeros budini* (Pocock, 1941) from north-western Argentina, *Lynchailurus pajeros steinbachi* (Pocock, 1941) from Bolivia, *Felis (Lynchailurus) colocolo crespai* (Cabrera, 1957) from north-western Argentina, and *Felis colocola muñoai* (Ximénez, 1961) from Uruguay and *Lynchailurus colocolo wolffsohni* from Chile were all members of the Pampas cat group. Even the genus varied from *Felis*, to *Lynchailurus*, to *Oncifelis*, and has now become *Leopardus*.

In 1994, García-Perea compared various morphological characters of 96 museum specimens. By grouping similar features, Garcia-Perea suggested there were three distinct species of Pampas cats: *Lynchailurus pajeros* (Desmarest, 1816), *L. braccata* (Cope, 1889), and *L. colocolo* (Molina, 1782) each with one or more subspecies.

Nevertheless, by 1996, the IUCN Cat Specialist Group concluded the Pampas cat group was a single species *Oncifelis colocolo* (note the ending letter "o" as opposed to Molina's ending "a") with many different morphs inhabiting South America. But the Pampas cat group would morph once more.

In 2020, Nascimento and his colleagues combined morphological, molecular, biogeographical, and climatic niche analysis to better understand similarities and differences in the Pampas cat group. They identified five unique species without any subspecies: *Leopardus braccatus* (Cope, 1889), *L. colocola* (Molina, 1782), *L. garleppi* (Matschie, 1912); that usurped the subspecies *thomasi*, *budini*, *steinbachi*, *crepoi* and *wolffsohni*, *L. munoai* (Ximénez, 1961) and *L. pajeros* (Desmarest, 1816); that usurped the subspecies *crucina*. In other words, the Pampas cat group was now separated into five distinct species. The IUCN Cat Specialist Group has not yet weighed but in 2022 a revision of the Felidæ will commence.

Why splitting the Pampas cat group matters

When a species or group is separated, each population necessarily become smaller, *i.e.*, there are fewer individuals in each separate species or group. In the case of Munoai's pampas cat (*Leopardus munoai*), the result of becoming a unique species has global significance because the total population is estimated to be no more than 200 individuals occupying grassland habitat in SE Brazil, a habit that is rapidly being converted into industrial soybean production. Remaining native grasslands are highly fragmented, bisected by roads and highways with no culverts, and targeted for conversion to soybean. As a result, Munoa's pampas cat will become the most threatened species of wild cat on earth and hence IUCN Critically Endangered, thus requiring immediate conservation actions of a magnitude not seen for any cat species in South America. To wiggle out of an expensive conservation issue, Munoa's pampas cat could be considered a subspecies of its sister species, the more widespread Cope's Pampas cat (*L. braccatus*). Arguably, the loss of a species matters more than the loss of a subspecies. Fortunately, government authorities in Brazil accept that Munoa's pampas cat is a unique species.

We will not await a consensus to decide that Munoa's Pampas cat deserves immediate actions.



Are canine diseases threats to small cats? - Tadeu de Oliveira, Tiger Cats Conservation Initiative

Canine distemper has taken a toll on African Lions. Are canine diseases an unseen threat to small cats in South America? If so, how widespread are canine diseases in wild cat populations?

In Brazil, canine distemper virus (CDV) has been found in Ocelot, Jaguarundi, and Pampas cat, as well as Jaguar and Puma. In Ivinhema National Park, 60% of the Jaguar population tested positive. Jaguarundi and Pampas cat were also positive for parvovirus in Emas National Park. Moreover, in Emas NP 71% and 57% of dogs tested positive for CDV and parvovirus, respectively. Fully 57% of Jaguarundi and Pampas cat tested positive as well. Samples to test Tiger cats are very rare, but one author claims herpesvirus a problem. Evidence from Puma, Jaguar, and Ocelot in Costa Rica supported this conclusion. One can only imagine the toll >1,000 feral dogs in Mirador State Park are taking on five species of small cats. Sadly, few samples from the smaller cats are even analysed. Tiger cats in Mirador State Park have never been tested.

The author of one study concluded "Canine distemper virus in wild felids seems to be related with home range use and in close association with domestic dogs living in nearby areas."

The problem is not restricted to certain locations. Samples from 19 Jaguar, 9 Puma, and two Ocelot were tested for presence CDV. All cats were free-ranging individuals living in two protected areas in the Brazilian Atlantic Forest. From the 30 samples analyzed, six Jaguars and one Puma tested positive for CDV. In addition, 111 domestic dogs from nearby areas were sampled for CDV. Approximately 70% tested positive.

Despite its name, canine distemper virus is known to infect a variety of species in the order

Carnivora. Although it does not affect the Domestic cat, big and small wild cats as well as other carnivores are affected. The disease name should become "carnivore distemper virus" (Terio & Craft 2013). Indeed, Terio & Craft stated: "One of the greatest threats to the conservation of wild cat populations may be dogs or, at least, one of their viruses. Canine distemper virus (CDV), a single-stranded RNA virus in the Paramyxoviridae family and genus *Morbillivirus*, infects and causes disease in a variety of species, not just canids."

That is why we have a dog neutering and vaccination program in Mirador State Park, a global wild cat hotspot. We would like nothing more than to declare that all small cat populations everywhere are safe and secure so we can go out of business. Unfortunately, threats, like viruses, keep morphing. So must our threat reduction programs.

[Tiger Cats Conservation Initiative](#)



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Newsletter September, 2020

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