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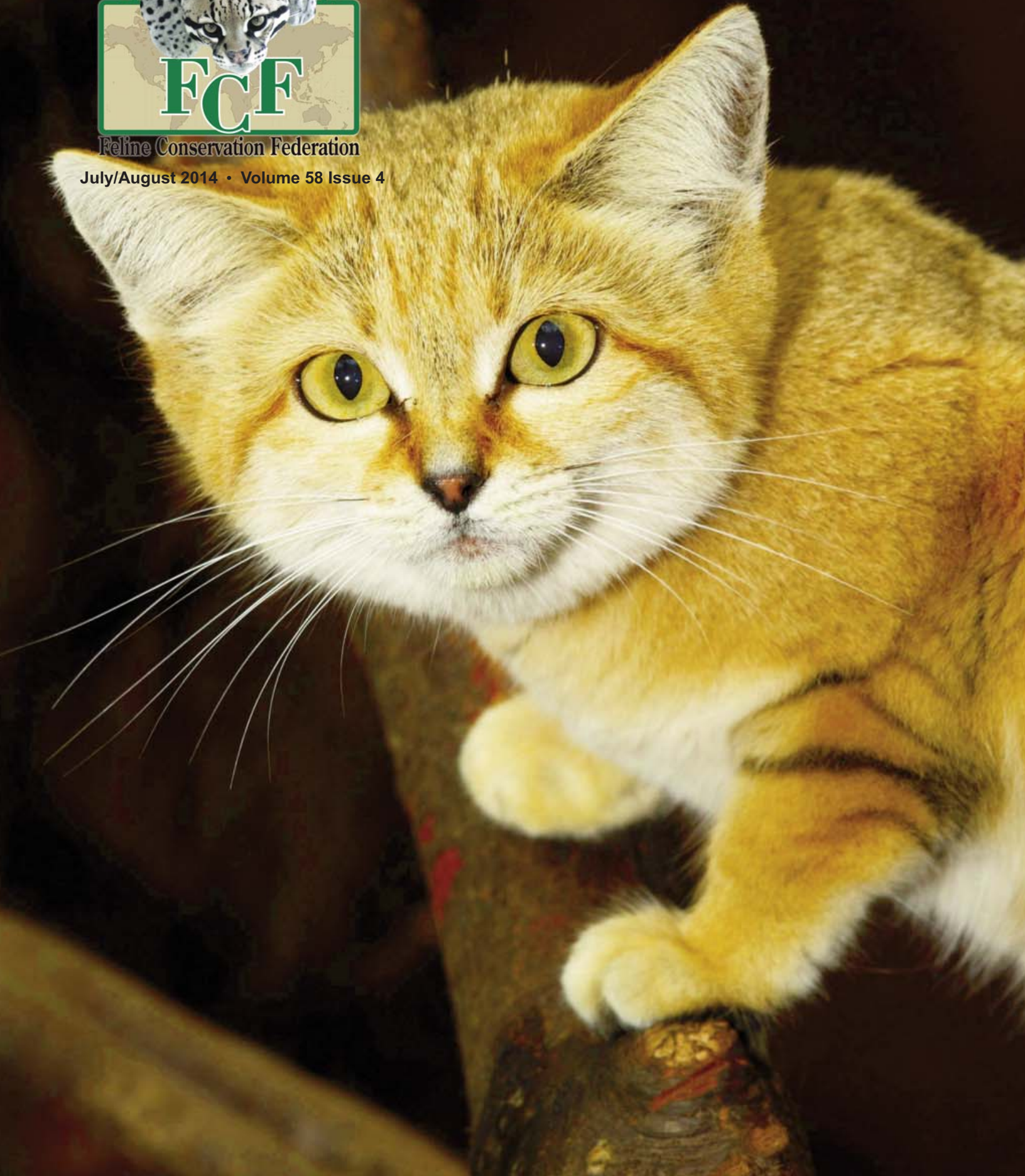


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Arabian Wildlife

By Balazs Buzas
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(Adapted from a talk at the FCF Con-
vention in Scottsdale, AZ



The Arabian Peninsula encompasses seven counties and holds many threatened and endangered species of wildlife, including the critically endangered Arabian leopard.

The Arabian Peninsula is an important part of Western Asia (Asian continent), between Africa and Asia, and is also called Arabia or the Arabian subcontinent. It was formed by the Arabian tectonic plate moving from Africa toward Asia, as a result of the rifting of the Red Sea 56 to



The Gordon's wildcat (*Felis silvestris gordonii*) distribution is widespread and presumed to cover most of the Arabian Peninsula, except the big sand dune areas. Unfortunately, Gordon's cats are threatened by hybridization with feral domestic cats. This specimen is most likely a hybrid.

23 million years ago. This three million square kilometer area is mainly desert, with mountains around the coast on the east and south.

The climate is either arid, desert climate or arid, steppe climate. During summer, it is hot and humid near the sea and experiences either no rain or heavy rainstorms. Some areas, like the Dhofar area in Oman, and the Al Mahrah area in Yemen, have a summer humid tropical monsoon climate.

The Arabian culture is a religious Muslim culture with traditional Bedouin lifestyles. The Bedouins are desert-dwelling Arabian ethnic groups usually divided into tribes or clans. In contrast, there is the modern urban lifestyle. Traditional hunting with Arabian greyhound Saluki and falconry are practiced.

Twenty-five percent of Arabian species are threatened with extinction. The most important mammal species are the critically endangered Arabian leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*) and one of his prey, the Arabian tahr (*Arabitragus jayakari*). According to the "Regional Red List Status of Carnivores in the Arabian Peninsula," published by the IUCN

in 2011, the other felid species are also threatened by



This three million square kilometer area is mainly desert, with mountains around the coast on the east and south.



poaching and habitat loss.

The Gordon's wildcat (*Felis silvestris gordonii*) distribution is widespread and presumed to cover most of the Arabian Peninsula except the big sand dune areas. The major threat is hybridization with feral and free-ranging domestic cats, the same problem wildcats (*Felis silvestris*) have in Europe. The IUCN Red List status is Near Threatened, and the number of Gordon's cats in zoos worldwide is less than 100 specimens.

The sand cat (*Felis margarita*) population is likely declining as sand dune habitat continues to be lost. Additionally, they are sometimes caught for the international pet trade. The IUCN Red List status places this cat at Near Threatened. According to the latest Sand Cat Studbook, the captive population is less than 200 animals. The biggest captive population lives in the Al Ain Wildlife Park in the United Arab Emirates.

The Asiatic caracal (*Caracal caracal schmitzi*) is widespread in the region and



The sand cat (*Felis margarita*) population is likely declining as sand dune habitat continues to be lost.



The Asiatic caracal (*Caracal caracal schmitzi*) is widespread in the region and appears to be stable at present. This caracal photographed is from South Africa.

appears to be stable at present. IUCN Red List status is Least Concern, but the number in zoos is less than 50, with very few specimens represented outside of Arabia.



Balazs Buzas works at the Al Mayya Breeding Center, Al Mayya Sanctuary, Fujairah, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Balazs spoke at the FCF Convention about the endangered felines of the Arabian desert and mountains.

The Arabian specimens of cheetah were collected during the last century and were assigned to the Asian subspecies (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*). This one lives in Iran. DNA analysis has recently confirmed that the animal shot in Dhofar region in Oman, in 1977, belonged to this subspecies. The IUCN Red List status is Critically Endangered and only a few of these felids are living in a breeding center in Iran. Captive cheetahs in Arabia are the North African (*A. jubatus soemmeringii*) and South African subspecies (*A. jubatus jubatus*).

The Arabian leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*) is endemic to the Arabian Peninsula, except for small populations in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, and in the Negev desert in Israel. The IUCN Red List status is Critically Endangered. The latest studbook shows less than one hundred living in ten institutions, with the biggest populations in the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife (BCEAW), Sharjah, UAE, and in Taiz Zoo, Yemen.

There are around 70 breeding



Arabian specimens of cheetah collected during the last century were assigned to the Asian subspecies (*Acinonyx jubatus venaticus*). The cheetah above was photographed in Pardisan Park, Tehran, Iran.

centers, private collectors, and zoos across the peninsula. Lots of private collections mainly house hundreds of gazelles, Arabian oryx, scimitar-horned oryx, and African ungulates, but there are at least ten breeding centers and some big zoos. Only one rescue center exists, located in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Lots of confiscations of birds, baboons, cheetahs, and other wildlife happen in the region at the busiest international airport in Dubai.



The Arabian leopard (*Panthera pardus nimr*) is endemic to the Arabian Peninsula, except for small populations in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt, and in the Negev desert in Israel. Photo by Hadi Musalam Al Hikmani.