

Status of the Sand Cat, *Felis margarita*, in the United Arab Emirates

by Peter Cunningham

Abstract: A recent sighting of a Sand Cat, *Felis margarita*, from the Al Ain region of Abu Dhabi Emirate in July 2001, confirms the existence of this species in the United Arab Emirates. Indications are that the Sand Cat is more widespread in the UAE than previously recognized. Its status, habits and diet are also discussed.

Kurzfassung. Die Beobachtung einer Sandkatze, *Felis margarita*, im Juli 2001 in der Gegend von Al Ain in Abu Dhabi bestätigt das Vorkommen der Art in den Vereinigten Arabischen Emiraten. Es gibt Hinweise darauf, dass die Sandkatze in den Emiraten möglicherweise weiter verbreitet ist als bisher angenommen. Der Status, Verhalten und Nahrung werden diskutiert.

Key words. Middle East, Arabia, distribution, zoogeography, carnivores.

Introduction

The Sand Cat, *Felis margarita* Loche 1858, has a natural distribution range which includes much of North Africa, the Sinai Peninsula, Israel/Palestine, Jordan, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics and Arabia (ABBADI 1993, BUNAIAN et al. 1998, GASPERETTI et al. 1985, HARRISON & BATES 1991, JONGBLOED 1998, KINGDON 1991, MENDELSSOHN 1989, NADER 1990, QUMSIYEH 1996). Although nowhere common, its distribution is widespread throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Although quoted as being excluding from Bahrain (historically) and Qatar (current) (Conservation Breeding Specialist Group, SSC/IUCN 2000), HARRISON (1972) and GROSS (1987) both mention its existence in Qatar. Although confirmed and published records from the Arabian Peninsula are scarce (DUCKWORTH 1996), the Sand Cat is thought to be more widespread than collection records indicate (GASPERETTI et al. 1985, HARRISON 1983). Very little information exists for the subspecies *F. m. harrisoni* Hemmer, Gruber & Groves 1976, found in the United Arab Emirates. A record is communicated here from the Abu Dhabi Emirate, which is, according to all available evidence, the first confirmed record of a live *Felis margarita* from the UAE.

Observations

On 18 July 2001 at approximately 10h00 an adult Sand Cat was positively identified in the area ± 35 km northwest of Al Ain in Abu Dhabi Emirate of the UAE. The cat was flushed from its den on the western side of a small calcrete hill by the observer approaching on foot.