

The tiger and other cats

Malaysia has eight members of the *Felidae* family, all totally protected because of their rarity and vulnerability. The tiger, the panther and the golden cat are found only in Peninsular Malaysia, while the bay cat is found only in Sabah and Sarawak. Common to both areas are the clouded leopard, the marbled cat, the flat-headed cat and the leopard cat.



Foreign stores showing the clouded leopard (*Nogolius nebulosus*) seized by Fox Malaysia in 1995 to increase public awareness of this endangered animal.

The were-tiger

Fear of the tiger has given it an important place in superstitions of many Southeast Asian peoples. Traditionally, Malays have been reluctant to use the name of the tiger when talking about it. They prefer to use names such as 'Pak Deking' ('Mr Stripes'). Common to a number of societies is a belief in the were-tiger, a person who can change himself into a tiger. Such a belief has been used by leaders to rally fear into their followers, and also to collect contributions from those who do not wish to risk falling foul of the were-tiger. Some traditions, however, give the were-tiger a helpful personality. It is thought that a person who is a were-tiger can be identified by the absence of a cleft in his upper lip.

The tiger and panther

The Malaysian tiger (*baronius*) (*Panthera tigris roborus*) belongs to the Indochinese subspecies, which ranges from Myanmar and Vietnam to Peninsular Malaysia. In 1992, the tiger population was estimated to be about 500. Most are in the major primary and secondary rainforest areas in the northeastern states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang, including Taman Negara, which straddles these three states. There are also significant tiger populations in Perak and Johor. The panther (leopard) (*baronius leonburgi/ningtung*) (*Panthera pardus*) is thought to be rarer than the tiger.

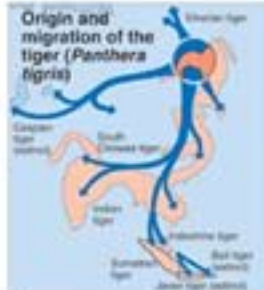
Largest of the cats in Malaysia, an adult male tiger averages 2.62 metres in total body length (including tail) and a female, 2.38 metres. They can weigh up to 150 kilograms. The panther can reach 1.94 metres in length and weigh about 33 kilograms. It has a soft and dense coat, with a pattern of rosettes. Once considered to be separate species, the spotted panther and the black panther are now regarded as colour variations of the same species. The spotted panther is very rare; the last confirmed sighting was in Pahang in 1994.

Both the tiger and the panther are solitary species. An adult female tiger has a territorial range of at least 20 square kilometres, while a male's territory is larger, overlapping the territories of two or four females. At the age of two, a tiger cub establishes its own territory. The usual prey of both the tiger and the panther is wild pig, although they do attack deer and other animals. Panther cubs start killing small prey by the time they are 6-7 months old. At the forest fringes, tigers and panthers prey upon livestock. In the past, this led to the shooting of rogar animals. However, since classification as totally protected species under the Protection of Wildlife Act, they are now driven back into the forest. In serious cases, the tiger or panther is caught and taken to the Melaka Zoo. Since 1984, more than 30 tiger cubs have been born in a captive breeding programme at the zoo.

The clouded leopard

Because of its arboreal and nocturnal nature, the clouded leopard (*baronius nebulosus*) (*Nogolius nebulosus*) is the least known of the big cats in Malaysia, but it is believed to live in most major forests. It can reach 1.65 metres in total body length and weigh up to 16 kilograms. Clouded leopards seem to live in pairs, hunting together for prey such as mouse deer, small wild pig, monkeys, orang utan, porcupines,

rats and birds. Like panthers, they often spring on ground prey from overhanging branches. Cubs at young as three months old begin to kill their own prey.



The smaller cats

Very little is known of the distribution or ecology of the golden cat (*Capiposna (Felis) temminckii*), but it is believed to be distributed throughout Peninsular Malaysia. It can reach 86 centimetres in length, and weigh as much as 12 kilograms. Usually terrestrial, it can climb when necessary. Prey includes mouse deer, birds (especially pheasant), lizards and other small animals. The male is reported to play an active and tolerant role in rearing kittens, which weigh only about 250 grams at birth.

Probably the only wild cat still found in Kuala Lumpur is the leopard cat (*boeing boei*) (*Prionailurus (Felis) leopardsi*), the most widespread of the Malaysian cats. One entered a monitor lizard trap in the Lake Gardens in January 1995. In oil palm plantations, this cat helps to keep the rat population low. The leopard cat can reach 83 centimetres in total length, and weigh 4 kilograms.

The marbled cat (*Parade (Felis) marulata*) is little known, probably due to its arboreal and nocturnal habits. It can reach 108 centimetres

long, and weigh 2-3 kilograms. It preys on small animals such as mouse deer.

The flat-headed cat (*Capiposna (Felis) planiceps*) is widely distributed throughout Malaysia. In addition to the forested areas, it is known to be present in the Merbok mangrove forest in Kedah, the riverine habitat of Perit in Perak and in oil palm plantations. It is about the size of a domestic cat—about 66 centimetres long and 2.1 kilograms in weight. Captive animals seem fond of water, and like to eat fish, frogs, mice and rats.

Reported only from Sarawak and one unconfirmed sighting on Mount Kinabalu in Sabah, the bay cat (*Capiposna (Felis) baylei*) is the least known of the Malaysian cats. It has a body length of about 1.12 metres.

Malaysia's cats in their rainforest home

1. Black panther (*Panthera pardus*)
2. Marbled cat (*Parade (Felis) marulata*)
3. Clouded leopard (*Nogolius nebulosus*)
4. Spotted panther (*Panthera pardus*)
5. Leopard cat (*Prionailurus (Felis) leopardsi*)
6. Tiger (*Panthera tigris roborus*)
7. Flat-headed cat (*Capiposna (Felis) planiceps*)
8. Golden cat (*Capiposna (Felis) temminckii*)



ESTIMATED DISTRIBUTION OF TIGERS IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

STATE	NO. OF LOCATIONS	NO. OF ANIMALS
Johor	20	36
Kedah	12	11
Kelantan	30	81
Negeri Sembilan	6	9
Pahang	40	27
Perak	15	21
Selangor	5	12
Terengganu	14	108
Taman Negara	27	81
Total	212	491