

DESERT PYGMY WITH THE VOICE OF A TIGER.

Dr. Rosemarie Wolff

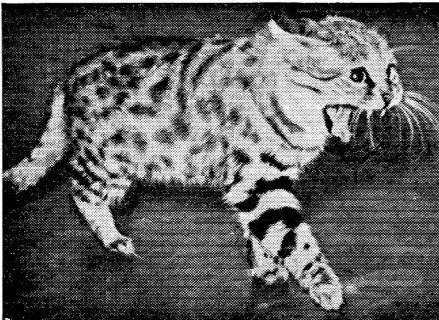
(These two papers, translated from the German, are reprinted through courtesy of die edelkatze.)

The Black-pawed cat (*Felis Nigripes*) is a rarity among wild cats. It is a child of the desert and lives — even there only rarely encountered — in Southwest Africa, in the Kalahari and the adjacent arid veld. The toms grow to only 5 pounds in weight, while the females weigh about 3 pounds. Its head, somewhat round and large in proportion to a small, delicate body, reminds one of the African fallow cat, (the ancestor of our domestic cat),



Dr. Wolff and friend

its fur displays pretty, vivid dotted markings on a background of warm yellowy hue, as in the Indian Bengal cat. The little desert cat, indeed, does not have black paws, only the black streak on the pad which is found in many species of wild cat. Its name would really be more properly applied to our Seal Point Siamese! Their origin is not clear — perhaps they are related to the fallow cat. According to other conjecture they are related to Bengal cats, and would be considered at the same time akin to the Siamese cat. In "Scientific and Technical Survey", 1962, #24, P. 768 Dr. Leyhausen expresses the opinion: "The truth seems to me to be somewhere between these two interpretations: the Bengal cat is obviously very closely related to those breeds of cat from which are descended on the one hand the South American tiger-cats and ocelots, and on the other, the Eurasian-African 'true' wild cats (the 'Felis' species in the strict sense) and in due course the lynx. In my opinion, the black-pawed cat did not evolve from the fallow cat, but from ancestors more akin to the Bengal cat. It would therefore be considered a geologically older survival, which was forced away into the desert and semi-desert by the 'modern' fallow cats."



Black-Footed Cat

Vocally the black-pawed cat is a miniature tiger. Its mewing can only be compared to the tiger's roar, only about one octave higher. If one plays a recording tape with the "black-pawed cat's roar" at half the recording speed, one hears a tiger's roar which, though in slow time, is otherwise deceptively realistic. As has already been mentioned, "black-pawed cats

are very seldom in their home. Most probably they inhabit large regions, for crossing which they possess an untiring gait, and the strong call is needed so that the sexes may find each other over long distances for mating."

It has only rarely been possible hitherto to raise litters of these pretty cats in captivity. Dr. P. Leyhausen and Barbara Tonkin report on such successful rearing at their Institution in the "Int. Zoo Yearbook" 6 pp. 178-182. After only a short period of heat which lasts al-



Photo B. Tonkin

Black-footed Desert Cat with Kitten

together 36 hours at the outside, the females bear their young after 68 days.

The first essential for keeping black-pawed cats is a dry, uniform warmth. With the high moisture content of the air in these latitudes black-pawed cats are prone to chronic chills; the nose runs and the eyes water and the general condition is poor. Hence to keep these animals successfully rooms with climate control are desirable, to ensure that the air is not only uniformly warm, but also dry.

For nutrition there should be no shortage of small, fresh animals for prey (chickens, mice, young rats, etc.) Moreover, fresh grass is vital. Also the freedom-loving little cats must have at their disposal an area of at least 10 sq. meters per animal; otherwise they lack the impulse to run around and they pine away.

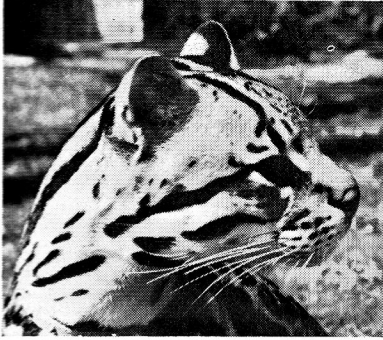
Black-pawed cats develop clean habits; they will readily cover over their box with large quantities of sand or other material. Yes, they will, when occasion arises, just like Bengal cats, make use of receptacles with water, preferably running.

In their life's rhythm they are not so much nocturnal animals as are other kinds of wild cat. With the proper care these exquisite, elegant animals become tidy household members and attractive zoo dwellers.

Note from R. W.: Referring to our article: "Wustenzwerg mit Tigerstimme" (Desert Cat with the Voice of a Tiger): Mrs. Barbara Tonkin of Max-Planck—Institut für Verhaltensphysiologie, sent us the following rectification: Concerning the theme housetraining of black-footed cats unfortunately I must say: 'It **would** be wonderful!' They **do** use their pan with sawdust—but rarely to the purpose meant for it by human beings. Sometimes they take their meal in there, they also like to dig a hole just for sleeping in it. Now and then they also urinate there, but nearly all their feces are distributed at random somewhere, when they are going for their long walk. Also the females do spray nearly as much as the males."

DON'T GET A WILD CAT!

This title was stolen — from Konrad Lorenz' "Animal Stories". His title was, inoffensively, "Don't Get A Chaffinch", which immediately brought upon him so many reproachful letters from Chaffinch-lovers, as he himself relates in the second edition of his little book, which is in all other respects most distinguished and amusingly written. A warning against leopards and other truly wild cats ought to draw far fewer protests!

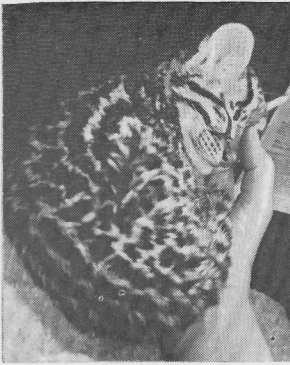


Dr. Wolff's Oci

Still, to quote once again our eminent observer of behavior, Professor K. Lorenz: "Only very few people know which animals are suitable and grateful objects of affection. More and more, nature-lovers attempt to keep animals as pets, and more and more this attempt fails, owing to the unsuitable means employed and mistaken choice of animal." How right he is, is proved by a few events which affected me recently. "We had to do away with our Siamese cat; she cried too loudly. Can you help us to buy a miniature tiger-cat?" (To this day I have not succeeded entirely in convincing these people that a wild cat is much harder to keep than a Siamese!) "We wanted an ocelot, but this one of ours remains so small. Couldn't you find someone to buy it?" It was a tree ocelot and I found a wonderful place for it, yet the little animal, which was completely tame with the first owner, became shy, and was dead at the end of three months. Exactly the same thing happened with a Bengal cat: it missed its "first people," grew shy and died.

Mr. Rodenstein, out of pity for his she-ocelot, "Coquita," took charge of a recently imported, very young ocelot which was still suffering from the hardships of captivity and transportation. He cured it of all sorts of minor ailments and was delighted with the tameness and the amusing antics of the little fellow. Although the animal was certainly with his sister-ocelot and with the Persian cats more than with his "temporary" human keeper, it soon became obvious that this "Pardus" was perfectly used to Mr. Rodenstein, who had made an impression on him. As Mr. Rodenstein was giving back the little animal, till then perfectly trusting and ever friendly, to the owner, "Pardus" furiously bit the latter's finger through to the bone! Also he has been shy in his new home ever since; he no longer allows anyone to take hold of him!

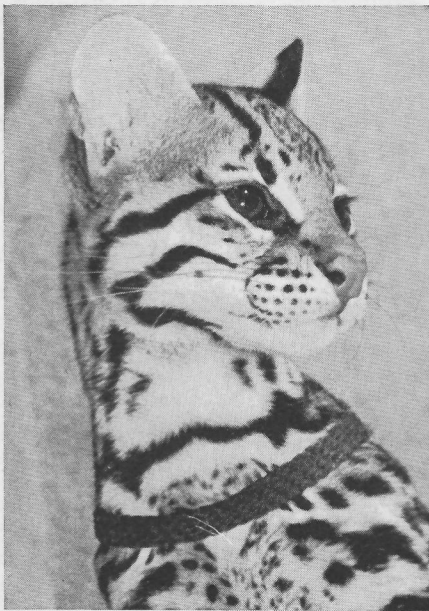
Konrad Lorenz writes about dogs: "Personal friendship is of supreme importance to a dog. Yet consider that it imposes no small obligation, for friendship with a faithful dog is indissoluble. Giving him away is equivalent to murder."



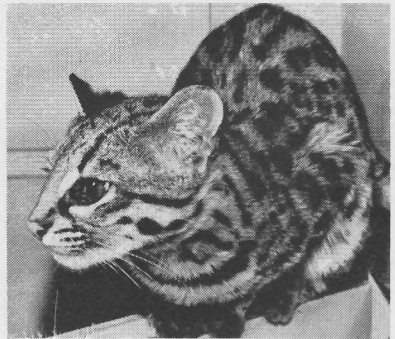
Oci as a kitten would
fit into my hand.



In a playful mood.



Ocelot owned and photographed by R. Wolff.
Don Lotto Mrarero



Brazil Cat, Oncilla



Oci

I believe that wild cats are even more "one-man animals" than dogs. I reviewed a few issues of a magazine published by a New York ocelot club, and it is heartbreaking to follow the history of these animals in them, from the joy at the young animal's arrival, to the almost always bitter end — whether it be through a change of owner or death during an operation. In America it is quite customary to adapt these wild animals not only by castration or sterilization, but also by the removal of claws and eyeteeth, to reduce them to defenseless playthings. Anyone who decides to make a pet of any such wild animal should know that this decision must be final — if he does not wish to be responsible for an animal tragedy. There is certainly nothing more thrilling than a wild creature which is completely trusting in man, docile and attached. But rarely indeed does one have the good fortune to obtain a little animal so young and so used to human beings that these ideal conditions are fulfilled. Besides, keeping such animals is very much more difficult than is the case with a domestic or thoroughbred cat. If the wild cat is to develop and remain strong and healthy, it is essential to provide creatures like doves, one-day-old chicks, mice, etc. for food. They are to be freshly killed, yet at body temperature.

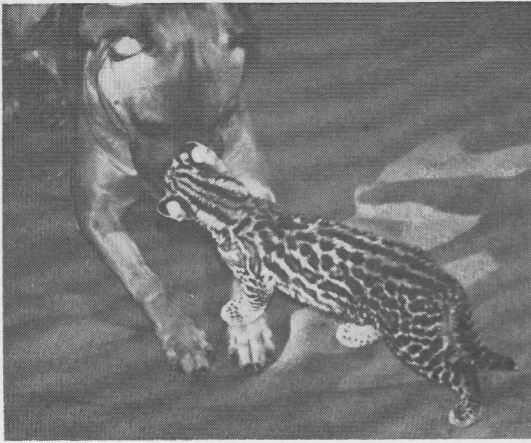
Undoubtedly the most difficult problem in keeping true wild cats is their odor: not only the male animals, but the females urinate often and generously — and many never become house-trained.

Finally, looking after a young still tamable little animal is always a lottery — one never knows in advance what fate or the animal dealer has in store for one.

It happened to us, too! Still we can consider ourselves fortunate; at least it wasn't a jaguar! But I saw through a crack in the packing-crate at the airport that the miniature tiger tomcat ordered from South America was not the long-desired husband for our "Pardi." A tiny, bristly, spotted South American cat with thick paws and the two characteristic patterns on neck and head, which never occur in miniature tiger cats, swayed back and forth with a discontented half-snarling and half-purring sound under the criss-cross bars. When he was finally released from his prison at home, he immediately climbed up on me and introduced himself in his Louis Armstrong voice, "Mrarero!" He sank down to my lap and began to suck ecstatically at my arm as if he had at last found his own long lost mother again. No doubt about it, our tiny two-pound baby was already used to people.

I just wished — the wish is father to the thought — that we had the tree ocelot (Margay) which one can imagine at least as far as size is concerned, in a modern, human dwelling.

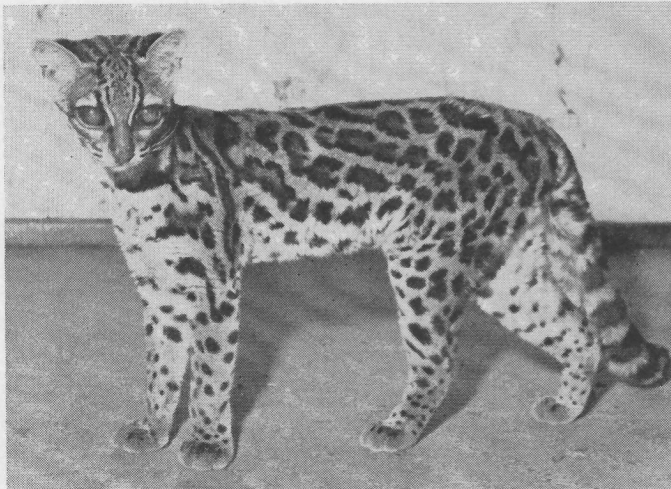
Weeks later Dr. Leyhausen came by to see us. "Are you aware that you have a real ocelot there?" I did not know . . . I did not want to believe him. I had read somewhere that ocelots can attain weights of up to sixty pounds. "They don't all grow that big!" the cat expert consoled me. Now we are waiting, and watching the scales from week to week.



Ocelot "Oci" as a very young kitten, not afraid of our dog. Later, they were unfriendly, when "Oci" matured.

Photo R. Wolff

W. Rodenstein's Coquita with male Oncilla "Tao." Photo: Walter



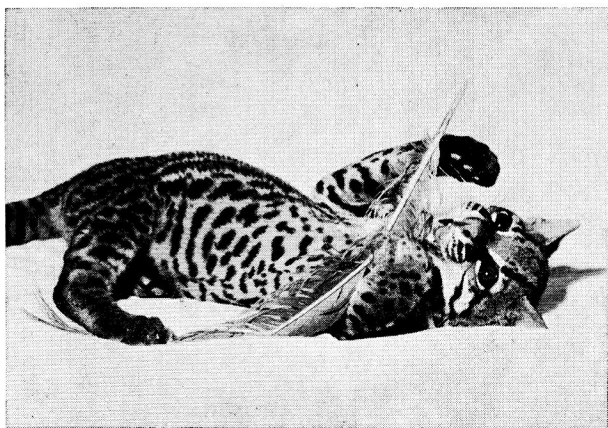
Margay
(Female)
Owner: W. Rodenstein

Photo: A. D. V. Walter

(Editor's note: Since these two pieces were written, Dr. Wolff has written me to add a postscript to the Ocelot story since the cats have reached adulthood. C. S.)

"Oci" is a beautiful, strong male now. Six months ago he went to live with the Rodenstein's female ocelot, Coquita. At first they did not agree at all; Coquita was very jealous of him, as she seems "imprinted" (to belong to) with Herr Rodenstein. Therefore, Oci, at first, was very unhappy, even afraid of Coquita, although, of course, she is smaller and not nearly as strong as Oci. We thought it might not work, and were prepared to take Oci back. He became quite a "handful" to cope with, but he was never savage or mean. Since he had matured, he developed a fear of strangers, and I no longer dared to go for a walk with him. He had also become quite stubborn against doing anything he did not want to do. At one time, I put on his ten meter leash and walked with him in the garden, but when the time came to return him to his room, he just stood and growled warningly. Once, however, in a similar situation, when I was pulling him on his leash, he raised his paw against me playfully and by chance his claw hit my upper lip; his claws were sharp as razorblades and I found my lip was split and bleeding. After getting him in, I saw a doctor who repaired Oci's "playful" pass with six stitches; he made a good job of it by the way, for there was hardly a scar.

By and by, Oci and Coquita got adjusted to each other, even to the point of sometimes sharing the same mattress. At last, it was only a fortnight ago, they mated! Although it was a very temperamental affair, they loved each other dearly and tenderly. Now we are waiting to see if little Coquita is pregnant. Herr Rodenstein is not too keen on getting a litter of young ocelots, since it is difficult to find good, permanent homes for them, but a group of youngsters is hard to resist; they are very playful, sweet and easy to handle. It is a different story, however, once they mature. They must have their own quarters, spacious and roomy, with fresh air and trees and furthermore they want company or they are dejected and unhappy!



W. Rodenstein's
Coquita, Ocelot

Photo, A. D. V. Walter