

Jaguarundi – *The Otter Cat*

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The jaguarundi is a small cat native to Central and South America that is a little larger than a house cat. The appearance of this cat is unique among felids in that it more closely resembles a weasel or otter, and therefore is sometimes referred to as the “otter cat.”



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With a slender, elongated body, short legs, a small flattened head, short weasel-like ears, a long otter-like tail, and a sleek, unmarked coat, an adult jaguarundi can weigh as little as 6 pounds or as much as 20. These cats stand 10 to 14 inches at the shoulder and reach a length of up to 3 feet, not counting the tail. They have three color variations that include black, brownish-grey, or red. Any or all colors can occur in a single litter, but generally the darker colors are found in the rain forest and paler colors are found in drier environments. Jaguarundis are one of the only felines that have no contrasting colors on the backs of their ears.

While not native to the southeastern United States, it is believed that a feral population of jaguarundis exists in Florida, established from an introduced population of escaped pets during the 1940s. Apparently thinking they were easier to tame than most wild cats, some people used them to help control rodent populations.

In Alabama, rare sightings have been reported from the southwestern and central part of the state, but there is no physical evidence that the cat exists here. Sightings from credible sources have occurred at Gulf State Park in Gulf Shores and other locations in Mobile and Baldwin counties as late as the early 1990s.

However, none of those sightings were confirmed by photographs or tracks, and there have been no reported sightings since the mid 1990s.

Though highly adaptable, the natural habitat of this wild cat is dense forest and shrubby areas. It is a good swimmer, an adept fish hunter, and is usually found near water. In addition to fish, birds are frequently preyed upon, as are rodents, small reptiles, and frogs.

Although the fur of the jaguarundi is not highly sought after by fur traders, the cat is at risk through general deforestation and loss of its natural habitat. In the United States where sightings are very rare, the jaguarundi is classified as an endangered species and as such is protected from hunting and trapping.

For more information regarding the jaguarundi or other wildlife species found in Alabama, contact Marisa Futral, State Hunter Education Coordinator with the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, at marisa.futral@dcnr.alabama.gov.



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