



## The Ocelot

The ocelot is a wild cat that has historically been hunted for its fur. At one time it faced the threat of extinction. It is mainly found in four distinct clusters across Central and South America: **Central America and Mexico, north-northwest South America, north-northeast South America and southern South America.**

The scientific name for the ocelot is *Leopardis pardalis*, which means "like a leopard," but there are no leopards where ocelots are found. They got their name from the Aztec word *tlalocelot*, which means "field tiger."

Ocelots prefer to live in areas with thick vegetation. They occupy a wide range of habitats including mangrove forests and coastal marshes, savanna grasslands and pastures, and tropical forests.

During the day, they sleep hidden among bushes, on a tree branch, or inside a hollow tree. Nighttime is when ocelots do their hunting and moving about.

Without lots of places to hide, ocelots cannot survive.

### Description



Ocelots have distinctive striped and spotted markings. The fur can range in colour from a pale cream to a reddish gray with spots that run on its back and sides like links in a chain. The underside is snow white with tiny black spots and stripes. These markings allow it to blend perfectly with its surroundings. The markings on the ocelots are like fingerprints, no two ocelots are marked the same. They have a long tail that is generally marked with

dark rings and large paws in relation to their body size. Similar to other wild cats, the ocelot can retract its claws into protective pockets that prevent them from becoming blunt while the animal is walking about.

Males are generally larger than females weighing between 30-40 pounds while the females generally weigh between 20-30 pounds. Ocelots have 30 teeth in their mouths and incredible bite strength for such a small cat.

Like all small cats, ocelots have very good vision and hearing. Their eyes have a special layer on the inside that collects light, so ocelots can see much better in the dark than people can. Being nocturnal, an



ocelot can walk around at night as easy it is for you to do so during the day. Their sense of smell is also a lot better than a human's. Long whiskers help the cat feel its way around. Unlike many cats, they do not avoid water and can swim well.



Although small mammals such as rodents make up the majority of its diet, they are known to hunt a variety of small animals including rabbits, birds, fish, crabs, lizards and snakes and will even hunt small deer. The ocelot is also known to eat monkeys, turtles, armadillos and anteaters. Their diet varies depending on the season and prey availability. Though they are predominantly nocturnal, they can also hunt during the day if prey are abundant then. Generally ocelots hunt alone.

Not only is the ocelot an important predator in its environment but they are also preyed upon by a number of large carnivores. Other felines including jaguars and pumas prey on the smaller ocelot, along with birds of prey such as the harpy eagle, and biggest snakes like the anaconda.

### **Breeding**

A male ocelot keeps a territory that overlaps four or five females' territories, so he can easily find a mate. Males often mark their territory to tell other males to stay away.

An ocelot family is made up of a female adult and her kittens. After breeding, the male and female ocelots go their separate ways. The female is pregnant for a little over two months and can have a litter of one to four kittens. The mother protects her kittens, feeds them, and cares for them all by herself. As the kittens grow, the mother ocelot teaches them how to hunt. By the time they are eight months old, they can hunt for themselves but may stay in their mother's home range for up to two years.

### **Threats**

The ocelot has been described as being tolerant of disturbed habitat and persists in wooded patches near human settlements. Although widespread commercial harvests for the fur trade ceased decades ago, some illegal trade still persists. At present the major threats are habitat loss and fragmentation, illegal trade (as pets and for pelts), and killing by farmers due to ocelots feeding on poultry. Currently, the ocelot is listed as a species of least concern (LC) on the IUCN Redlist of Endangered Species.

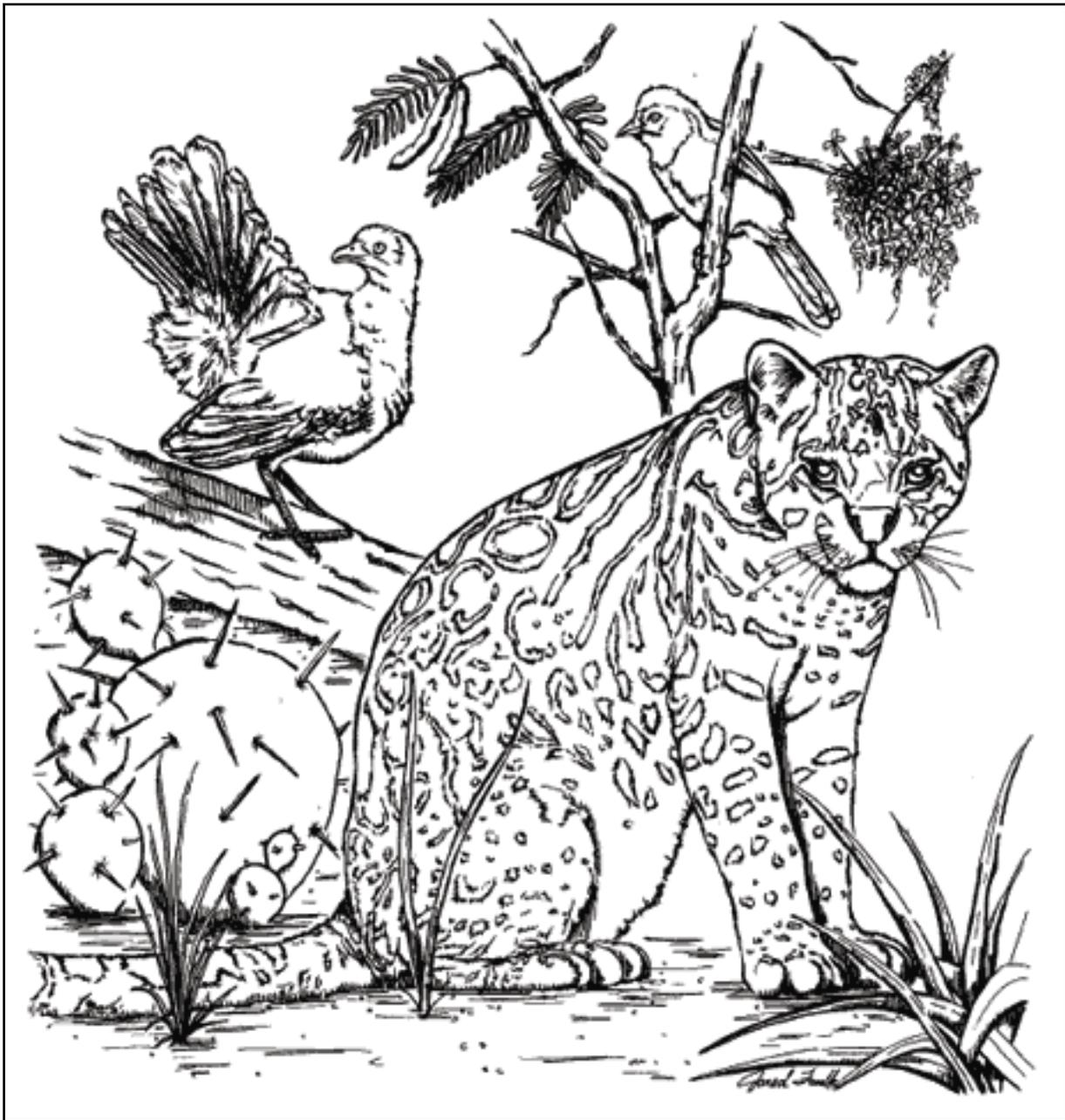
For more information on the ocelot log on to:

<http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/11509/0>

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/ocelot/>

### Kids' Activity

Have fun colouring the ocelot scene below.



You can share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”, C/O EIT Division, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, GEORGETOWN or email us at [eit.epaguyana@gmail.com](mailto:eit.epaguyana@gmail.com)