

# Distinguishing Wildcats

After examining more than 130 cat skins collected over the last 100 years from major UK museum collections, Andrew Kitchener, National Museums Scotland, Jennifer Ward, University of Edinburgh, and Nobuyuki Yamaguchi and David Macdonald, University of Oxford carefully analysed the cats' coat patterns in order to work out which of 17 features could be used to distinguish between wildcats, domestic cats and their hybrids.

This analysis revealed that there are seven key characters that distinguish wildcats:

1. Dorsal stripe on lower back always stops at the root of the tail.

2. Tip of tail blunt and black.
3. Distinct aligned tail bands.
4. Unbroken flank stripes.
5. No spots on rump; stripes may be broken, but distinct.
6. Four nape stripes broad, wavy and unfused.
7. Two shoulder stripes.

In addition there are eight other characters of secondary importance, such as the presence of white paws, or the whiteness of the chin, which might indicate a hybrid. While these characters can easily be examined in a road casualty or a museum skin,

in a field situation, this definition of a wildcat is likely to be more relaxed and would probably include some hybrids, which looked like large striped tabbies with a bushy, ringed, black-tipped tail.

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