Shoemaker, H. W.

Felis catus in Pennsylvania?

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Felis Catus in Pennsylvania?

Being Reports of the Taking of a Genuine European Wild
Cat in Tinicum Township, Bucks County,
January 16, 1922.

Compiled by
Henry W. Shoemaker
Author of "Pennsylvania Wild Cats", etc.

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EUROPEAN WILD CAT, KILLED IN PENNSYLVANIA, 1922
(Front view)

EUROPEAN WILD CAT KILLED IN PENNSYLVANIA
(Under view)

INTRODUCTION

FOR years the writer has heard the persistent under-current of rumors that *Felis Catus*, or some allied type of long-tailed wild cat was an early inhabitant of the Pennsylvania forests. Frankly he did not believe these stories, thinking that the animals in question were either feral house cats or young of *Felis Cougar*. The recent capture of a specimen in Tinicum Township, Bucks County, its description and photographing, all make it seem as if, after all, there was a long tailed wild cat in Pennsylvania, along with the Panther (*Felis Cougar*), the Canada Lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*) and the Bob Cat (*Lynx Rufus*). As the heathcock, the Carolina Paroquet and the Moose Jay ("Camp Robber") were exterminated in Pennsylvania before they were generally included in our lists of wild life, and although the wolf has been extinct less than a third of a century, not a skin or bone remains, it is possible that the long-tailed wild cat or 'coon cat, never a plentiful animal, and of nocturnal habits was wiped out of existence without being recorded in our natural history. Appended hereto are the contemporary newspaper accounts of the capture of the wild cat, taken from the "Bucks County News" of Doylestown, Pa., which seem to be unusually clear and comprehensive, while for frontispiece appears photographs of the specimen, taken by State Game Warden Warren Fretz, of Doylestown.

It seems a great pity that this animal was not kept alive, but it is hoped that if the mate is ever taken, its life will be spared for the benefit of science and the joy of nature-lovers. In this connection it may be well to quote statements of some competent Pennsylvania sportsmen and naturalists on the subject of the coon-tailed wild cat in this State:

C. H. Shearer, Artist, of Tuckerton, Berks County, born in 1846, says: "When I was a boy the long-tailed wild cat inhabited

the range of mountains which culminates at Mount Penn, above Reading. I have caught three of them in my time in Irish Gap, say about 1857 or 1858, two by a hind foot, and one by a front foot. I always dreaded to get them in my traps as they fought so fiercely and were hard to kill. They were larger than the biggest domestic cats, their winter coat very fluffy, their faces were broad and the tails were beautifully ringed. I was never sure if they were a native wild animal, or were brought over by early Colonists from Europe, or else were tame house cats gone wild, in the third or fourth generation. I have sketched them, and remember their appearance as clearly as if it were yesterday."

Chauncey E. Logue, State wild animal trapper, of Woolrich, Clinton County, born on First Fork of Sinnemahoning Creek, in 1870, and probably the leading bob cat hunter of his generation says: "The older people where I was brought up, it was a wild region up to twenty years ago, always gave me to understand there was a fourth species of the cat family in Pennsylvania, a long-tailed wild cat. As a small boy I saw the carcasses of several that had been killed by hunters, and my recollection is clearly that they were not like house cats that took to the woods." Emmanuel Harman, hunter, of Mt. Zion, Clinton County, born in 1832, who died several years ago said: "Young panthers were sometimes found in the woods by the early settlers and because of their long tails, called 'wild cats', but there was also a true wild cat in the Pennsylvania mountains, with a long tail, clearly marked and barred; these I have seen and helped to kill several times when I was a boy." George A. Betzer, State Game Protector, of White Deer Mountain, Lycoming County, born in 1862, says: "As a boy in Snyder County, in the mountains I always heard the old hunters say that there were still a few long-tailed wild cats left, of a race fairly plentiful when the first settlers came in, but quickly killed off or driven away. Once while on a hunt I helped to kill a magnificent long-tailed wild cat; it ran up a tree and out on a

limb, and we shot it. I examined it closely, and it was anything but like a domestic cat that becomes wild. I have seen many domestic cats that took to the woods, they are great game destroyers, and I have killed them, but there are differences about the size of the head and body which allow no mistakes being made by a careful observer." It will be indeed interesting if a form of *Felis Catus* can be added to the list of our Pennsylvania fauna at this late date and it will show that science never stands still, that there are constant rewards in store for the seekers after knowledge. It is hoped that the publication of this little pamphlet will have the effect of shedding further light on the question, and that communications will come in from experienced hunters and trappers, who will by the weight of their evidence either prove or disprove this important and interesting topic. Just because natural histories, often the work of parlor or professional naturalists, who do not dare deviate from the hewn path of their equally indoor predecessors, declare that such and such an animal or bird does not exist or never existed, probably several species have been lost or confused in Pennsylvania faunal history—cases in point are the Black Moose, and the Bison, now clearly established as a part of our list of mammals within the past two hundred years.

HENRY W. SHOEMAKER,

Altoona Tribune Office, May 6, 1922.

BOB-CAT KILLED BY C. E. LOGUE

WILD CAT CAUGHT IN TINICUM TWP.

Rare Animal, Supposed to Be Nearly Extinct, Trapped by 16-Year-Old Lad

SPORTSMEN TO SEE IT HERE

A GENUINE wild cat, a species of animal that is now said to be very rare in this country, was trapped and killed on Monday, January 16, by Tunis Brady, the 16-year-old son of Joseph Brady, on the Cook premises, on the edge of the State Auxiliary game preserve in the Tinicum Swamp, this county. With the possible exception of two similar animals killed about two years ago by a son of Daniel Trouts in the same locality, this is probably the first wild cat known to be taken in Bucks county for nearly three-quarters of a century. The last wild cat shot in central Bucks county was killed on Spruce Hill, about a mile below Chalfont fifteen or twenty years before the Civil War. This capture is said to be the only authenticated taking of a wild cat anywhere in the county until the capture last Monday—but the Spruce Hill cat may have been a bob cat.

The carcass of the Nockamixon cat is now in the possession of Game Protector Warren Fretz, who will exhibit it at the annual meeting and smoker of the Bucks County Fish, Game and Forestry Association next Tuesday night, when it will no doubt be an object of great curiosity to the sportsmen.

Terrified the Neighborhood

For three years residents in the vicinity of the Auxiliary Game Preserve have known of the presence of some strange wild animal in the vicinity, which uttered "unearthly" yells at night. So terrifying were the cries of this animal that timid women in

that sparsely settled part of the county were afraid to go out of the house at night. Young Brady tracked two strange animals a few weeks ago to a den in some huge rocks near his home on the Cook place and set a trap with the idea of capturing them. Three times they sprung the traps without being caught.

Put Up a Big Fight

Last Monday the animals were less fortunate and one of them, the male, was securely caught with one hind foot and one front foot in the trap. When Brady went to look at the traps in the morning and found that he had captured some animal, he attempted to kill it with a club, but the animal put up such a terrific fight that the boy thought it would break the trap-chain and escape. He then procured a rifle and killed it with several shots in the head. It was the male cat, and its companion, believed to be a female, is still under the rocks.

Not a Domestic "Wild" Cat

The captured animal is not a domestic cat gone back to a wild state, but is, without much doubt a distinct species—a genuine wild cat. It is not a bob cat nor a Canada lynx, nor is it a cross between these two animals, as some people have pronounced it. It corresponds exactly with the description of the wild cat contained in Dr. J. G. Wood's "Natural History," and it occupied precisely the habitat which Dr. Wood says the wild cat frequents, "rocky and woody country, making its home in the cleft of some rocks," a place just like that in which this wild cat was captured.

The Cat's Measurements

The animal captured in Nockamixon has strong and powerful claws and teeth, and its head is large in proportion to its body. It apparently has not an ounce of surplus flesh, being sinewy and wiry, and yet it weighs eight and a half pounds. Its length from the tip of his nose to the tip of its tail is 30 inches. Its body length is 20 inches and it stands 13 inches high. Its front legs are 7 inches long and its back legs 13 inches. Its head

CLEM HERLACHER AND TROPHIES

measures 11 inches in circumference the broad way and $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches the long way. It measures 3 inches between the ears and 7 inches across the ears. Its body is 12 inches around just behind its forelegs and $14\frac{1}{2}$ inches around the centre. Its tail is scant 11 inches long, thick and inclined to be bushy, which distinguishes it from the domestic cat, which has a long tapering tail.

Its Peculiar Markings

Its markings are precisely those Dr. Wood describes for the wild cat—the fur being a sandy gray, with some yellow or buffy color, the buff color being particularly noticeable on the body under the hind legs. A dark line extends from the shoulders along the spine to the end of the tail. It has black “tiger” markings on the body, legs and tail. The black stripes extend entirely around the body and hind legs. On the front legs the black bands run into black patches on the under side.

The top of the head is black, and the face grey, marked with regular black lines. The “whiskers” or “feelers” are white, stiff and bristly and rather abundant. The chin and neck are lighter gray than the rest of the body and also buffy, with a median transverse double half-moon brown line. The throat has a conspicuous white spot.

The tail is of the prevailing gray color, ringed with bands of black, and has a long black tip, the whole resembling a raccoon’s tail. The dark markings on the animal are not uniform in intensity, but they contrast with the grey with sufficient strength to make it a very striking-looking beast.

Distribution of the Wild Cat

The wild cat, though little known here, is widely spread, being found not only in this country, but in the British Isles, Continental Europe, Northern Asia and Nepaul, though it is not as common anywhere now as it once was. It has been claimed that it is a native of Ireland, though this is disputed. It is sometimes called the British tiger, though it now is seldom found in England.

It has been claimed that the domestic cat originated from the wild cat, but this theory has been rejected by most scientific investigators. Domestic cats sometimes revert to wild life, but no matter how many generations they continue wild, there are still certain distinctions between the wild domestic cat and the wild cat. Some naturalists claim that our race of domestic cats originated from the Egyptian cat, which more nearly resembles the domestic cat than the wild cat, but, while this theory is highly probable, it has never been satisfactorily proven.

The capture of the Nockamixon wild cat is likely to cause a stir in scientific circles, because of the rarity of the incident. It is believed that there are several more of his breed in the same territory. In fact the animal is now so little known that some recently published natural histories do not even mention it—Bucks County News, January 20, 1922.

JOHN C. FRENCH

TINICUM WILD CAT DISCUSSION

Capture of European Species Raises Question of Its American Nativity

GREAT INTEREST IN "FIND"

THE publication of the story yesterday in the Bucks County Daily News of the capture of an European wild cat in the Tinicum swamp by Tunis Brady, a sixteen-year-old resident on one of the tracts included in the Bucks County Fish, Game and Forestry Association's Auxiliary Preserve, created great interest locally and among naturalists generally. It is also likely to raise a controversy as to whether or not the European wild cat is a native of this country. Dr. Wood, the author of the British work on natural history, quoted in yesterday's story, mentions this animal as being found in "this country," but he clearly means England and not America.

Should Be Investigated

Instead of becoming a matter of controversy, the question as to whether the European wild cat is indigenous to America ought to be a matter for serious and careful investigation. Present-day American writers on natural history do not mention the European wild cat as a member of the native fauna. While admitting that the animal captured in Tinicum may be the European wild cat (*Felis catus*), they say it is probably an escapee from a menagerie and does not belong to this country's fauna.

There are others, however, who believe that the *Felis catus* is an American animal; that in the early settlement of this country it was somewhat common, but, as it does not stand persisting hunting, had become practically extinct over a large area of the country. These claimants say that it has escaped notice in recent years because it so closely resembles the "tiger" type of domestic

cat, and that hunters who have killed them in modern days have never brought them to the attention of naturalists because they thought them domestic cats, and thus they have escaped the attention of naturalists.

Naturalists May Have Overlooked It

Dr. Henry C. Mercer, of Doylestown, who saw the animal killed in Tinicum, not only says that the specimen is an European wild cat, but is inclined to the opinion that the animals are indigenous to this country. He cites a quotation from Oliver Goldsmith's "History of Animated Nature," in which Goldsmith states that Columbus was shown one of these wild cats by a hunter who killed it on this side of the Atlantic.

Well Established in Tinicum

It may be difficult to prove now that this animal is native to America. There is not much doubt, however, that it has become thoroughly established in the Tinicum Swamp. Residents in the vicinity have known of the existence of strange animals there for several years. Two similar animals were killed in that territory between two and three years ago, while the one trapped this week had a mate which is still in hiding in the rocky fastnesses of the swamp region.

The specimen captured on January 16 is still in the possession of Game Protector Fretz, who has called the attention of Dr. Woodruff, a noted naturalist of this State, to the capture. The animal will be exhibited at the annual meeting and smoker of the Bucks County Fish, Game and Forestry Association in the Sixth Regiment Armory next Tuesday night, after which it will be placed in the hands of a taxidermist for mounting.—Bucks County News, January 21, 1922.

BOB CAT RECENTLY KILLED IN SNYDER COUNTY

TRAPPED BOB CAT

TINICUM CAT TRUE WILD CAT

Species Not So Near Extinct as Many Naturalists
Think

ITS HABITS ARE NOCTURNAL

By Miss Elizabeth C. Cox, of Holicong

I HAVE been very much interested in the Wild Cat, caught in the Tinicum swamp. I went to see it and was much surprised to read that the sportsmen generally pronounced it a "domestic cat."

Species Not Nearly Extinct

Instances that have come to my knowledge lead me to believe that it is a wild cat, and that the species is not so nearly extinct as is suggested. Years ago I read a book, entitled "Early Settlers in Canada." It was a very old book, the story of an English family who settled in central Canada, while that country was a trackless wilderness. One night one of the boys of the family shot an animal in a tree near the house. When they examined it, they think it a domestic cat, but an old man, a hunter and trapper, who has spent practically all his life in the forest, tells them that it is a wild cat, that while it is smaller than either the Canadian lynx or the more common bobcat, it is much more fierce than either of them and cannot be tamed, and the reason they have not encountered it before is because it is entirely nocturnal in its habits. The description of the animal, in the book, as I remember it tallies perfectly with the specimen in Mr. Fretz's possession.

One in the Philadelphia Zoo

One time at the Philadelphia Zoo they had in a small cage an animal ticketed "Indian Devil." When I first saw it it was

JAKE HAMERSLEY, Cat Hunter

C. H. SHEARER, READING, PA.

curled up asleep, and looked like a large house cat, but when aroused it jumped against the bars of the cage hissing and spitting, with ears laid close to its head, bit at the bars and seemed in a perfect frenzy to attack us.

Some time afterwards, when visiting the zoo, I asked an old man, who was working about the garden, if he remembered the "Indian Devil."

"Oh yes," he said; "it was one of them wild cats out of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It soon died. You can't keep 'em in captivity. Why, that beast just spent every night while it lived buttin' its head agin the bars tryin' to git out. It eat enough, but it just killed itself tryin' to git away."

As I remember the cat at the zoo it was not quite as distinctly striped as Mr. Fretz's cat, and was, perhaps, a little larger, but it had the same large round head, flat ears and short ringed tail.

Found in Fayette County

A lady whose home was at one time on the summit of Chestnut Ridge, a spur of the Allegheny Mountains, in Fayette county, Pennsylvania, tells me that these long-tailed wild cats are by no means uncommon there; that often in driving at night they would see a wild cat cross the road in front of the car, taking his time and staring at the lights as he went. She says she never knew them to attack anyone, but that when they drove in a carriage they always carried a pistol as a protection against wildcats, and that they were always warned that if they had meat in the carriage and encountered a wild cat to throw the meat to it and get away as fast as possible.

(Miss Cox's contribution to the Wild Cat question is very interesting and valuable. Miss Cox is one of the most careful investigators and most conscientious naturalists in Bucks county, and her opinion and the facts she relates should have much weight. It is to be hoped that other naturalists will make similar inquiries.—EDITOR.)—Bucks County News, January, 1922.

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