

New Findings of the Pallas's Cat in Vitim Plateau (Transbaikalia)

Igor V. Moroldoev

*Institute of Systematics and Ecology of Animals, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences
Frunze 11 Novosibirsk 630091 Russia*

Abstract

Key words: *Otocolobus manul*, Transbaikalia, endangered species

Article information:

Received: 18 Sept. 2019

Accepted: 05 Nov. 2019

Published online:

13 November 2019

Correspondence:

igmor@list.ru

Cite this paper as:

Two new findings of a rare wild cat, *Otocolobus manul*, have been reported. The observations were made on Vitim Plateau (Northern Transbaikalia), more than 250 km from the main range of the Pallas's cat. There have been no report of manul captures in the Khorinsk and Eravna districts of Buryatia, it should be considered that these individuals are part of a single population inhabiting the Barguzin Valley, the mountain forest-steppe and rocky biotope of the Ikat ridge and the adjacent western part of the Vitim plateau.

Moroldoev, I. V. 2019. New findings of the Pallas's cat in Vitim Plateau (Transbaikalia). *Mong. J. Biol. Sci.*, 17(1): 73-75.

Introduction

The Pallas's cat, *Otocolobus manul*, is a species of carnivorous feline mammals common to the dry steppes and semi-deserts of Central Asia. They range from southern Transcaucasia and western Iran to Transbaikalia, Mongolia, and north-western China (Ross *et al.*, 2016). In Russia, the manul is found in the steppe regions of Southern Siberia: Altai, Tuva, Buryatia, and Transbaikal region (Barashkova *et al.*, 2019). Due to the extremely low abundance and fragmentation of the range, the manul is listed in the Red Book of Russia, as well as in the Red Books of five Russian regions (Barashkova *et al.*, 2017).

In Buryatia, located east of Lake Baikal, the total area of potential habitat for the manul has been estimated at 28,900 km², which consists of two isolated areas (Fig. 1). The first of these isolated areas are the steppes and forest-steppes of the Selenga River Basin, from the border between Russia and Mongolia in the south to the latitude of Ulan-Ude in the north. The modern distribution of the manul is limited to patches of steppe mainly in

southern Buryatia, where Daurian pika (the main forage object of the manul) is numerous and the snow cover does not exceed 15 cm. The second isolated area is the central and eastern part of the Tunka Range, the Irkut River Basin and Tunka valley where manul inhabits Kobresian alpine meadows and Dryas tundras (Koshkarev, 1998; Medvedev, 2007).

Results

In 1976, in the Barguzin Valley, near Alla village (N54°41'58", E110°50'29"), a manul sighting was reported by R. Kharnaev, a hunter. Since then, however, there has not been a single case of the manul being seen north of Ulan-Ude. In winter 2013, a male manul cat was found caught by hunting dogs on the "stone run" of Hoigot Creek (N53°58'28", E113°03'48"), the left tributary of the Bolshoi Amalat River. This cat was found by hunter Dmitry Syrtsev. The mass of the beast was 3100 g, body length 53 cm, and tail

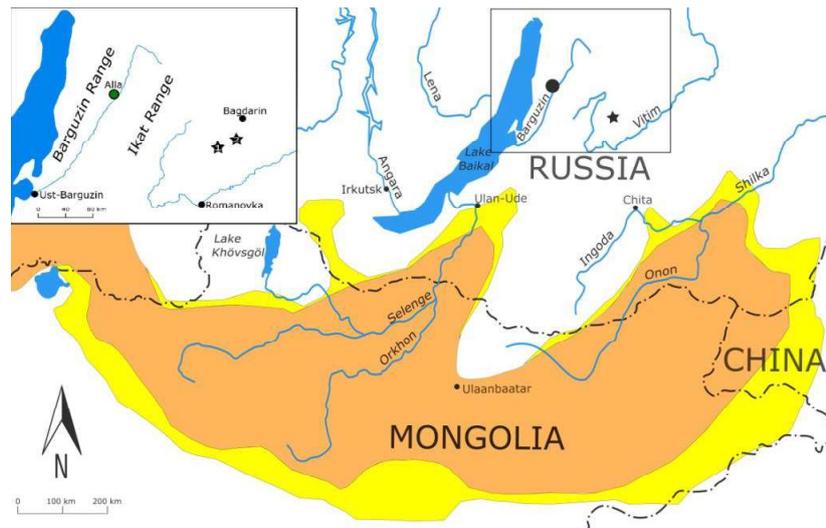


Fig. 1. Range of Pallas's Cat in Transbaikalia and Mongolia. Orange – extant, yellow – possible extant, Black circle – finding in Barguzin Valley in 1976, Black stars – two new findings in Vitim Plateau.

length was 24 cm (Fig. 2). Currently, there is a stuffed manul kept in the halls of the Museum of the Peoples of the North in Bagdarin, Bauntovsky District of Buryatia (Fig. 3).

As it turns out, this finding is not the first for the vast territory of the Vitim Plateau. According to the hunter Vasily Sim, in 1978 or 1979, a manul was hunted for 44 km of the Bagdarin-Romanovka road (N54°05'44", E113°28'09"). Unfortunately, neither the skin nor skull was saved. Both manuls were found on the Vitim Plateau in close proximity to each other, in the basin of the River Bolshoi Amalat. In a straight line, the distance between the points is about 30 km. Both areas are characterized by the presence of rocky landforms, with the lowest possible snowfall and plenty of stone piles where manul can hide from predators. The hunting grounds of the manul do not usually

cover a large area; depending on the abundance of food, they range from 1 km² (Kirilyuk, 1999) to 12-15 km² (Murdoch *et al.*, 2006).

Conclusion

Considering the distance from the manul sightings on the Vitim Plateau to the northern boundary of its main habitat in the Transbaikalia ranges 250 km, and the fact that there have never been any report of manul captures in the Khorinsk and Eravna districts of Buryatia, it should be considered that these individuals are part of a single population inhabiting the Barguzin Valley, the mountain forest-steppe and rocky biotope of the Ikat ridge and the adjacent western part of the Vitim plateau. This territory is practically uninhabited by people, poorly



Fig. 2. Male Pallas's Cat found in 2013 in Vitim Plateau.



Fig. 3. Stuffed manul in a hall of the local museum in Bagdarin, Buryatia.

covered by zoological research, so there remains the possibility that this rare species of predatory mammals still inhabit the northern regions of Buryatia.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by Russian Basic Research Program of the State Academies of Sciences, project # VI.51.1.4. (AAAA-A16-116121410119-4) and Russian Foundation For Basic Research, project # 17-04-00269. An anonymous reviewer made valuable suggestions on the manuscript.

References

- Barashkova, A. N., Kirilyuk, V. E. & Smelansky, I. E. 2017. Significance of protected areas for the Pallas's cat (*Otocolobus manul*: Felidae) conservation in Russia. *Nature Conservation Research*, 2 (Suppl.): 113–124.
- Barashkova, A., Smelansky, I., Kirilyuk, V., Naidenko, S., Antonevich, A., Gritsina, M., Zhumabai Uulu, K., Koshkin, M., Battogtokh, N., Otgonbayar, B., Grachev, A. & Lissovsky, A. 2019. Distribution and status of the manul in Central Asia and adjacent areas. *Cat News*, 13: 14-23.
- Koshkarev, E. 1998. Discovery of manul in Eastern Sayan. *Cat News*, 29: 12–13.
- Medvedev, D. G. 2007. Pallas's cat in Eastern Sayan and Tunka Valley. *Bulletin of East-Siberian Scientific Centre SB RAMS*, 2 (54): 93–96. (in Russian)
- Murdoch, J. D., Munkhzul, T. & Reading, R. P. 2006. Pallas' cat eology and conservation in the semi-desert steppes of Mongolia. *Cat News*, 45: 18–19.
- Ross, S., Barashkova, A. N., Farhadinia, M. S., Appel, A., Riordan, P., Sanderson, J. & Munkhtsog, B. 2016. *Otocolobus manul*. *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species*.
- Kirilyuk, V. E. 1999. The nutrition and behavior of manul (*Felis manul* Pall., 1778) in the south-eastern Zabaikaliye. *Bulletin of Moscow Society of Naturalists. Biological series*, 104(6): 41–45. (in Russian)
