

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

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Abstract

Key words: <i>Otocolobus manul</i> , Transbaikalia, endangered species	Two new findings of a rare wild cat, <i>Otocolobus manul</i> , 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.
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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