

Mysterious Corsican 'cat-fox' revealed as unique species

March 16 2023



New genetic analysis has 'revealed a unique genetic strain to the wild cats' found in the remote forest undergrowth of northern Corsica.

The elusive striped "cat-fox" familiar mostly to Corsican shepherds and as a source of intrigue to scientists, is indeed its own species specific to

the French Mediterranean island, the French office for Biodiversity (OFB) announced Thursday.

New genetic analysis has "revealed a unique genetic strain to the wild cats" found in the remote forest undergrowth of northern Corsica, it confirmed.

Genetic sampling clearly distinguishes the ring-tailed Corsican cat-foxes from mainland forest felines and [domestic cats](#), said the OFB in a statement.

While resembling house cats in some ways, the cat-fox earned its name from its length—measuring 90 centimeters (35 inches) from [head](#) to tail—and its distinct black-tipped, ringed tail.

Other distinguishing features include the stripes on the front legs, "very dark" hind legs, and a russet stomach. The dense, silky coat is a natural repellent for fleas, ticks and lice.

The inconspicuous feline finally became part of a concerted research effort—after years of playing a game of cat and mouse—when one was unexpectedly captured in a local chicken coop in 2008.

But it has long been part of local folklore.

"The cat-fox is part of our shepherd mythology," Carlu-Antone Cecchini, head of the forest cat mission at the National Hunting and Wildlife Office, now part of the OFB, told AFP in 2019.



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"From [generation](#) to generation, they told stories of how the [forest](#) cats would attack the udders of their ewes and goats."

The discovery of a unique genetic lineage is an essential step towards ensuring proper protection and conservation for the [endangered species](#).

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Citation: Mysterious Corsican 'cat-fox' revealed as unique species (2023, March 16) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-03-mysterious-corsican-cat-fox-revealed-unique.html>

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