



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

CLASSIFICATION OF EXOTIC SPECIES

RECOMMENDATION BY THE CLASSIFICATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

COMMON AND SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Caracal caracal* (caracal)

RECOMMENDED CLASSIFICATION: PROHIBITED

DATE: December 2021

Environmental Impacts

Caracals are native to arid areas of Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Pakistan, and northwest India. Caracals are carnivores that, in the wild, prey on birds, rodents, and other small mammals (e.g. hares, rock hyraxes, small antelope sp.). They stalk and ambush prey and can leap up to 10 feet to catch birds in midair. Caracals have been reported to kill domestic livestock such as chickens, goats, sheep (<https://wildcatconservation.org/wild-cats/africa/caracal/>) and may attack larger livestock such as cattle (<https://animals.sandiegozoo.org/animals/caracal>). In urban areas of South Africa caracals are known to have a high impact on domestic cats.

Given that caracals are generalist predators there is ample prey base to support an escaped caracal or a feral caracal population. Given they are capable of surviving in harsh, dry conditions it is unknown, but possible they could survive in Montana. It is unknown but unlikely that caracals would hybridize with other native cats in Montana, such as bobcat or lynx.

Health or Safety Risks

Unvaccinated felids, domestic and wild, can carry numerous diseases that could put both humans and wildlife at risk. Diseases include, but are not limited to, feline parvovirus, feline calicivirus, feline herpesvirus, and rabies (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152202/>). Commercially available rabies vaccinations are not licensed for wild animals (i.e. non-domesticated) and there is no consensus on the quarantine period needed before vaccine effectiveness. For this reason, there is no way to ensure the animal was fully vaccinated and unable to transmit rabies. In the event a person was bitten, it would be treated as an exposure and the Department of Livestock would recommend euthanizing the animal.

Caracals are powerful cats with sharp claws, thus there is potential to inflict injury. There are no reports of wild caracals attacking humans in the wild (<https://wildcatconservation.org/wild-cats/africa/caracal/>), and caracals have a long history with humans. Members of the nobility in the Middle East and India trained caracals to hunt birds and other small mammals as early as the 13th century and caracals have been trained to be successful animal ambassadors by zoos (e.g. Sand Diego Zoo). However, in 2019 an Illinois woman and her six year old were attacked and injured by a pet caracal that had escaped from its owner (<https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/News/video/mom-daughter-hospitalized-exotic-cat-attack-63927510>).

Control Considerations

Control measures would be needed to prevent negative impacts on the health and safety of Montana wildlife and small livestock. The Montana Department of Livestock would require a health certificate before the caracal could be imported into Montana.

Recommendation

In Montana there is currently one exotic CONTROLLED mammal (ARM 12.6.2208) and eight exotic NONCONTROLLED mammals, including jungle cats and servals (ARM 12.6.2205).

Due to significant health and safety risks, and the lack of adequate control measures the Classification Review Committee recommends that caracals be classified PROHIBITED. The following factors justify a PROHIBITED classification: (1) the ability to inflict physical injury has been documented per incident in Illinois, (2) commercially available rabies vaccinations are not licensed for wild animals, thus there is no way to ensure a vaccinated caracal could not transmit rabies, (3) an uncaged caracal could pose a threat to first responders, (4) escaped caracals could prey on native wildlife causing localized negative impacts, (5) escaped caracals could depredate small livestock and (6) it could be difficult to recapture escaped or feral populations of caracals.