

Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004

Guidance on the keeping of Ocelots, Asian Leopard Cats and Bengal Cats



**Environment &
Heritage Service**
www.ehsni.gov.uk

- 1. Species Names**

Leopardus (Felis) pardalis - Ocelot

Prionailurus (Felis) bengalensis - Asian leopard cat

And the Bengal cat (a hybrid between a domestic cat and an Asian leopard cat – *Felis sylvestris catus* x *Prionailurus bengalensis*)
- 2. Additional information**

All members of the cat family, except for the domestic cat (Scientific name *Felis sylvestris catus* – previously known as *Felis catus* or *Felis domesticus*) require a licence under this legislation.

Cat species other than those listed in paragraph 1 may have different husbandry and housing requirements to those listed below. If you propose to keep a small cat species not listed above, please contact the Department of the Environment for further advice.
- 3. Conservation status**

The ocelot and certain populations of the Asian Leopard Cat are classified as Annex A species under EC Regulation 338/97 (relating to the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)).

Special permits must be obtained to buy, sell, breed or use Annex A species for any commercial purpose.

4. Housing overview

Ocelots and Asian Leopard Cats are tropical species, and in the wild live both on the ground and in trees. If kept outdoors, they will require a heated shelter in cold weather, and an enclosure that allows them room to exercise on the ground and to climb.

Ocelots are usually kept in outdoor enclosures. Asian leopard cats may also be kept outdoors, or may be kept indoors as pets or breeding animals.

The Bengal Cat is a relatively new cat breed. They are a hybrid between the Asian Leopard Cat (which is required to have a licence under the legislation) and the domestic cat. Bengal cats therefore DO require a licence. They are generally kept as domestic cats in people's homes.

5. Keeping experience

In order to protect the welfare of these animals, keepers must be able to demonstrate a good knowledge of husbandry and handling of the species they wish to keep.

There should normally be a second named person nominated and included on the licence who is competent to care for the animals should the owner be absent or incapacitated.

Housing Recommendations

- 6. Construction** As these cat species are excellent climbers, outdoor enclosures should have a roof. Enclosures are normally made from wooden posts and wire mesh.

Any concrete or artificial flooring should be non-slip.

It is recommended that the floor of outdoor enclosures is covered in a mulch-type substrate such as bark chips or wood chippings to provide interest for the cats.

7. Fencing

Fencing for enclosures must be strong enough to withstand the weight of the cats climbing on it, and the mesh size used must be small enough to prevent the animals becoming entangled. If the enclosure fencing is the only means of separation from visitors, it is strongly recommended that the mesh size is small enough to prevent people putting their fingers through it.

The fencing should ideally be set into concrete foundations to prevent the cats digging underneath, and also to prevent predators digging in. All fencing should be well maintained.

Lockable indoor cages or kennels can also be used to house Asian Leopard Cats and Bengal Cats. Owners of Bengal Cats may keep the animals as pets with free roam of the house, however it is recommended that there is some facility for the animals to be secured in a room or cage if necessary.

Asian Leopard Cats should be caged, even if kept indoors, at all times but they must still be provided with sufficient space to exercise.

8. Size

The minimum recommended space requirements are:

Ocelots

4m length x 2m width x 2.5m high (13 ft x 6 ft 6 in x 8 ft) for a single animal.

Asian Leopard Cats and Bengal Cats

2m length x 2m width x 2.5m high (6 ft 6 in x 6 ft 6 in x 8 ft) for a single animal.

If smaller indoor enclosures are used to accommodate Bengal Cats, they must have the secure range of a larger area within the house during a portion of the day.

Any additional animals will require a further 50% increase in floor space, however see paragraph 14 below.

Please also see paragraph 18 on exercise and enrichment when designing the animals' enclosure.

9. Temperature and Shelter

The Ocelot and Asian Leopard Cat should be provided with a heated den if temperatures drop below 10°C (50°F). Heat in dens may be provided using heat mats. Whichever heating method is used, care should be taken to avoid the possibility of burns, and there should be sufficient space in the den for the cat(s) to move away from the heat if they wish.

All cats in outdoor enclosures should be provided with at least one draught-free den with sufficient clean bedding in which to sleep, hide, and shelter from extreme weather.

10. Lighting

Whilst small tropical cats are usually active during the night, they must be provided with some form of natural lighting during the day. The light should be sufficient to allow the keeper to clean and maintain the enclosure easily. The hours of daylight influences the breeding cycle of many cats, and so naturalistic lighting regimes (i.e. the natural lengthening and shortening of daylight hours through the year) are recommended for cats intended for breeding.

11. Ventilation

If the animals are to be housed inside, some form of suitable ventilation must be provided. Ventilation outlets and/or window openings must be covered if the cats are allowed to run loose in the house.

12. Drainage

The drainage of the outdoor enclosures must be capable of rapidly removing all excess water. Drains should be designed to avoid injury to the animals. Any open drains, other than those carrying surface water, should be outside the enclosure. Any faecal material must be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.

For indoor enclosures the floor covering should be changeable or easily cleaned.

13. Cleanliness

Outdoor enclosures should be maintained in a clean state, with faeces, food debris and litter being removed on a regular basis. Since cats “scent mark” by rubbing their cheeks and head and urinating on their enclosures, thorough disinfection of the outdoor enclosures should be done sparingly.

14. Social dynamics and behavioural considerations

All species of small wild cats are solitary in nature, and are intolerant of adults of the same sex, however breeding pairs may live together. It is therefore recommended that Ocelots and Asian Leopard Cats are not kept together in large groups.

If a group of animals is kept together, there should be several visual barriers to allow the animals to hide from one another.

Ocelots and Asian Leopard Cats enjoy climbing and may swim if water is provided. It is recommended that some provision be made for the cats to express these normal behaviours.

If more than one animal is kept, some provision should be made to separate them if necessary.

15. Prevention of escape

A double door with a space of approximately 2m² (18 ft²) separating the two gates should be erected at the entrance to outdoor enclosures, allowing the keeper to enter without a risk of the animals escaping. Both gates should be padlocked.

If Bengal Cats are allowed to run free inside a room, external doors must be locked and windows must be closed or protected with mesh to prevent escape. They must not be allowed to exercise outside unless contained in a secure enclosure with a roof. Exercise in public on leads or harnesses is not acceptable.

If an outdoor enclosure is accessible by the public, for example, adjoining a public highway, steps should be taken to prevent the possibility of the public gaining access to, or being injured by, the animals. This may require the erection of a secondary fence (a stand-off barrier), or a solid wall on the accessible sides of the enclosure. Warning signs may also be required.

- 16. Food, drink and bedding** In general, small exotic cats share the same food requirements as domestic cats. A high quality complete cat food, or a varied meat diet, including some whole prey items such as rabbits or day-old chicks, may be provided. The feeding exclusively of moist cat food will lead to dental problems.
- Fresh drinking water should be provided at all times.
- Bedding material in the dens can include wood chips, wood wool, or straw. Bengal Cats kept indoors as pets may sleep in commercially available domestic cat beds.
- 17. Visiting interval** The animals must be monitored at appropriate intervals, normally at least once every 24 hours.
- 18. Exercise and enrichment** The provision of enrichment items to provide the animals with interest and opportunity to exercise is extremely important for small cats. These species all enjoy climbing, and so there should be plenty of opportunity to express this behaviour within the enclosure. This may be achieved by the use of trees, logs, platforms, suspended walkways or commercially available “cat gyms”.
- Some individuals may enjoy running water within the enclosure, or an opportunity to swim. Other suitable enrichment would include the use of novel feeding methods (hiding the food around the enclosure or using different food items) and by including plants (which may be eaten!) into the enclosure.

- 19. Provision for capture and transportation**

Asian Leopard Cats, Bengal Cats and Ocelots may be transported to a veterinary surgeon in a locked cat or dog cage. A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify restrictions on the movement of these animals and procedures to be followed.
- 20. Emergency planning**

There should be a written contingency plan in place to be used in the event of an emergency, for example fire, flood, animal escape or injury to the keeper.
- 21. Notification Requirements**

A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify procedures to be followed in the event of an escape and on the provision of information to the Emergency Services (e.g. the Fire Service) on the dangerous wild animals being kept.

You are required to notify the Department of the Environment of any intentions to breed the animals.

22. Prevention and control of spread of infectious disease

Provision should be made to allow the separation of sick or injured animals if a group is kept. Temporary isolation can be achieved using a large, lockable plastic dog crate or similar.

The keeper should provide details of their veterinary arrangements with a practice prepared to treat these animals. A schedule of veterinary care, including vaccination and routine parasite control is required, and the keeping of records of veterinary attention is essential.

Animals acquired from outside the United Kingdom may be subject to rabies quarantine regulations. Anyone requiring further information should contact the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

There are no transmissible diseases carried by these animals that pose a risk to the general public as long as there is no direct contact, and visitors are not allowed to handle the animals or their by-products. Keepers should be aware of the risks of Toxoplasmosis, a potentially harmful parasite that may be transmitted to humans through cat faeces. For this reason, good hygiene practices should be always observed when handling cats, or cleaning their enclosures.

Explanatory Notes

These notes have been produced to provide people wishing to keep dangerous wild animals with guidance on the requirements they may have to meet. In determining whether or not a licence should be issued, the Department of the Environment will consider the information provided by the applicant when applying for a licence. The Department will also arrange for a suitably qualified person to carry out an inspection of the premises at which the animal or animals will be kept and the inspector's report will also be taken into consideration. It is at the Department's discretion to waive certain recommendations, or add additional ones, to the guidance provided in this document. There is a right to appeal within 21 days if a licence is refused or if the applicant contests conditions applied to a licence.

Contact Information

For further information on the Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, contact the Department of the Environment, Environment & Heritage Service, Biodiversity Unit on 028 9054 6502

For CITES enquiries:

Wildlife Licensing and Registration
Service
Global Wildlife Division
**Department for Environment,
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For rabies quarantine enquiries:

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