

Letter to editor: Incorrect identification of study species

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Received: 31 October 2016 / Accepted: 2 November 2016 / Published online: 24 November 2016
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Dear Editor,

Mirzakhani et al. (2016) presented the first confirmed case of the feline panleukopenia virus (FPL) in wildcat (*Felis silvestris*) in Iran using a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) technique. In principle, identification of such a contagious virus in captive conditions may surely expand our understanding of potential infections in captive and wild-ranging felid populations. Knowing valid scientific names of studied specimens in such studies is essential to trace host-vector relationships and disease trends. Mirzakhani et al. (2016) misidentified the 2-year-old specimen from Urmia Zoo that they examined during their study as the wildcat. Indeed, judging from Fig. 1 on the second page of Mirzakhani et al. (2016), this specimen is the jungle cat (*Felis chaus*).

While wildcats (Fig. 1) may be confused with domestic or feral cats (Reig et al. 2001), distinguishing wildcats

from jungle cats is relatively easy. Jungle cats are larger, have longer limbs and a shorter tail than wildcats (Firouz 2005). The wildcat's fur varies from tawny grey to light grey or sand coloured, showing pronounced stripes and spots on the flanks, head and limbs, and also distinct rings on the black-tipped tail (Firouz 2005). In most of the Middle East, including Iran, the Asiatic wildcat (*Felis silvestris ornata*) has spots on its flanks and head, while the coat of the jungle cat is uniformly sandy brown or greyish, without spots. The only markings of the jungle cat are vague stripes on its legs and less distinct rings on the tail (Firouz 2005, Gray et al. 2016). The other noticeable differences of the jungle cat are the black-tipped and slightly tufted ears, long limbs and a shorter tail (Firouz 2005; Yamaguchi et al. 2004; Yamaguchi et al. 2015). The jungle cat is heavier than the wildcat (3–8 kg and 2.5–5 kg, respectively) (Gray et al. 2016).

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Fig. 1. A camera-trapped Asiatic wildcat (*Felis silvestris ornata*) in Golestan National Park, Iran (left), and a jungle cat (*Felis chaus*) in Arevik National Park, Armenia (right). Note different overall shape, coating pattern and tail length. Credits: Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation (wildcat), I. Khorozyan/A. Malkhasyan (jungle cat)



Unfortunately, Mirzakhani et al. (2016) do not describe the origin, sex and morphometric measurements of the studied specimen, which would definitely be a valuable contribution to species biology and ecology. We appreciate the authors' study and do not intend to criticize its results, understanding that taxonomy is not a priority for comparative clinical pathology. However, correct identification of studied species is biologically important.

Conflict of interest Funding was provided by Erasmus Mundus SALAM2 (M.S), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (A.G) and Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (L.E, I.K and M.W).

Ethical approval No animals were handled during this study.

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