

The Iriomote Cat: The Island's Top Predator

The Iriomote cat, a subspecies of the leopard cat, is unique to the island. It crossed over from the Eurasian continent and found itself stranded when sea levels changed. Officially reported in 1965, the cat was recognized as a new species in 1967. With a population estimated at about 100, it is a critically endangered species. A nocturnal animal, it lives throughout the island, particularly favoring wetlands such as riverbanks and mangrove forests.

Iriomote is one of the smallest islands in the world that is home to a species of wild cat with only limited species to prey on. As a result, the Iriomote cat has evolved to eat over 70 creatures including lizards, snakes, frogs, insects, birds, bats, and freshwater shrimp. The principal threats it faces are road accidents, habitat loss, invasive species such as feral goats, and infectious diseases, particularly from domesticated cats. Conservation efforts include strict speed limits for motorists and animal underpasses beneath roads. The Iriomote Wildlife Conservation Center offers a variety of exhibits on the island's wildlife, including the Iriomote cat.

[175/ Target 150]

PHOTO CAPTION:

“The Iriomote cat is 50 to 60 centimeters in length, with a black spotted pattern covering its body. It has white lines around its eyes and white spots behind its ears.”