

First footage of new leopard species captured in Borneo

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An image grab from video footage released courtesy of A. Wilting and A. Mohamed of the Cat News Journal shows a newly identified Sundaland clouded leopard, caught on camera for the first time ever, stalking through the Dermakot Forest Reserve in Malaysian Borneo's Sabah state.



The first footage of a newly identified species of clouded leopard has been captured in Malaysian Borneo. Duration: 00:51

AFP - The Sundaland clouded leopard, a newly identified and little understood species of big cat in Borneo, has been filmed for the first time.

The leopard, a healthy-looking animal a metre long (3 feet) and weighing about 40 kilos (90 pounds) was caught on video at night at the Dermakot Forest Reserve in Malaysian Borneo's Sabah state.

"What surprised us was that while clouded leopards are very elusive cats, this one was not scared at all," said Azlan Mohamed, a field scientist with University Sabah Malaysia.

"Despite our powerful spot lights and the roar of our vehicle's engine, it walked around our vehicle calmly," he told AFP.

"It is rare to see the big cat in the wild. These cats are usually shy of humans, it was by chance we caught it on video."

The Sundaland clouded leopard was classified as a new species through genetic studies several years ago and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature designated it as endangered in 2008.

Previously all clouded leopards living across the Southeast Asian mainland were thought to be the same species.

Azlan said the Sundaland species is the biggest predator on Borneo, a resource-rich island split between Malaysia and Indonesia where wildlife habitats are under pressure from logging and plantations.

Because of their nocturnal habits, secretive behaviour and small numbers, little is known about the beast, including how many of them are living in Borneo.

However, Azlan said the researchers found the remains of a sambar deer which had been killed by one of the big cats.

Azlan is a member of a research team focusing on carnivores in Sabah, led by Andreas Wilting of the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research based in Berlin, Germany.

This big cat can be found in lowland rainforest on Borneo and in small numbers in areas of logged forest.

But environmentalists say that the clouded leopard faces the threat of poaching while rapid deforestation and the creation of rubber and oil-palm plantations in Borneo is destroying its natural habitat.

Azlan said Dermakot Forest Reserve, a 500 square kilometre (190 square mile) area which had been commercially logged but where replanting is now underway, is also home to four other threatened wild cats.

Sixty camera traps placed in Dermakot also captured images of the marbled cat, flat-headed cat, leopard cat and Borneo bay cat, all smaller in size than the Sundaland clouded leopard.

"These small cats feed on rats and mice," he said.

Azlan said the research team was "surprised" to find all five cat species in Dermakot and four of them in the neighbouring Tangkulap Forest Reserve.

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