

Bengal cat

Felis catus var. Bengal

What does it look like?

Bengal cats are an artificially created hybrid between the Asian leopard cat and the domestic cat. They were first introduced into New Zealand before 1998 when import restrictions were put in place.

The hybrid is a relatively large (4 to 9 kilograms), strong, agile animal with distinctive spotted markings which has, in recent times, made it a popular cat breed.

They are active hunters, dispatching their prey with a rapid pounce and bite. Unlike many other small cats, they do not 'play' with their food, maintaining a tight grip with their claws until the animal is dead. This may be related to the relatively high proportion of birds in their diet, which are more likely to escape when released than are rodents. While there is no direct evidence that Bengal cats or other hybrid cats have become wildlife predators in New Zealand or elsewhere their strong hunting traits, their size and intelligence suggests that they could become so if allowed.



Why is it a problem?

Bengal cats may predate on a wider range of native species than feral cats because of their larger size, e.g. adult kiwi and weka. It is also possible that Bengal cats could predate small farmed livestock such as lambs and chickens.

It is well documented that some Bengal cats have behaviours which make them unattractive as pets and increases the risk of owners wishing to get rid of them at worst by release into the wild. There has been wide concern expressed internationally and in New Zealand the 'wild genetic' traits in the hybrid will make it a very successful and dangerous predator if it became established in the wild and interbred with the feral cat population.



Related links

Apply for a Bengal Cat exemption <https://online.es.govt.nz/do-it-online/applications/pest-exempt?type=103&ed-step=1>

Summary of rules

You need a permit from Environment Southland to possess a Bengal cat within the Southland region. De-sexing and micro-chipping is a requirement of a permit.

Permits will not be given for Stewart island/Rakiura or other off-shore islands.

For full rules please see the [Southland Regional Pest Management Plan](#) (Rule 6).

If you detect or suspect the presence of Bengal cat within Southland you must immediately report its presence and location to Environment Southland.

For full rules please see the [Southland Regional Pest Management Plan](#) (Rule 7).

Management programme

Progressive containment

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Request info

<https://eservices.es.govt.nz/online-services/new/BiosecurityRFS/step/1?Subject=AnimalPests&Species=103>