

Andean Mountain Cat

Andean Mountain Cat
Oreailurus jacobita

The 10-pound Andean Mountain cat lives in the high Andes range of South America. "It is like a domestic housecat, except it is a big fur ball because it lives at such high altitudes where it's very cold," says Jim Sanderson, founder and director of the Small Cat Conservation Alliance. "It has a lot of hair, and its tail is huge and very furry, which it uses as a scarf. The cat used to eat chinchillas, but they were all harvested for their fur nearly to extinction. When that happened, the cat disappeared because that was [its] food."

Also, the Aymara people hunt the cat for religious reasons. The cat is an icon of their culture, and they believe that it has supernatural powers that can help them but only when it is dead. Today, Sanderson and his organization are actively working for the small cat's conservation.

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