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Press release

A joyful event for our grumpy cat

Pallas's cat kittens born in Tierpark Berlin's Himalayan area

The grumpy-looking Pallas's cat achieved international fame due to its appearances in popular internet memes. The number of these serious-faced felines at Tierpark Berlin has now increased significantly, as our female Pallas's cat recently gave birth to four kittens. When Tierpark vet Dr Andreas Pauly came to give the new arrivals their toxoplasmosis vaccine and microchips, eight bright blue eyes scowled back at him with a very clear message: "Don't even think about it, pal!" But although these grumpy wild cats have a large online fan base, they are still something of a mystery to zoologists.

The Pallas's cat, or manul, is roughly the same size as a domestic cat, though its long, thick fur – especially during the winter – makes it appear much larger. The cats need a thick coat to withstand the harsh conditions of their natural habitat: the chilly steppes, semi-deserts and mountains of Central Asia, from Afghanistan to Mongolia. And yet despite its extensive range, little is known about the Pallas's cat and its way of life. Researchers from the Pallas's Cat International Conservation Alliance (PICA) want to change that. Field research is one important aspect of their work. A recent study into the increase of domestic dogs in manul territory and the associated decline of the cat's population should provide the impetus for concrete, long-term conservation measures. PICA aims to work with local villagers to implement such measures and prevent the cat's decline in the wild.

"We are delighted by the birth of a litter of kittens to this increasingly threatened species," says Zoo and Tierpark Director Dr Andreas Knieriem. "With a little luck and patience, Tierpark visitors will be able to spot the bright-eyed youngsters in their habitat at the summit of the Himalayan area." The keepers and Zoological Director Christian Kern are also thrilled about the new arrivals: "These are the first Pallas's cat kittens to be born in our new Himalayan area – and the first at Tierpark Berlin in 18 years," says Kern. "The kittens did well in their veterinary check-up, but we are still keeping our fingers crossed." Although this timid feline species is still classified as "Least Concern" by the IUCN, the latest scientific findings show that wild populations are steadily decreasing. In certain parts of its range, the manul is in fact considered a threatened species. Habitat loss, poaching, poisoning of prey, and the encroachment of humans into its habitat are the main reasons for the population decline. Tierpark Berlin supports Pallas's cat research and protection initiatives in the species' natural habitat via its Berlin World Wild conservation programme.