

GROWTH OF A MALE CARACAL KITTEN *FELIS CARACAL* IN THE MOUNTAIN ZEBRA NATIONAL PARK

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Three caracal (lynx) *Felis caracal* kittens, two females and a male were received from the Fish River area some 50 km north of Cradock, Republic of South Africa, on the 20th March 1980. These were found at the base of a dense *Rhus erosa* bush on the side of a hill and estimated at 14 days old based on the findings of Cade (1968 *Int. Zoo Yb.* 45) and Kralik (1967 *Int. Zoo Yb.* 132).

The two females had a mass of 470 g and 540 g while the male weighed 460 g. The eyes were open and had an opaque blue colour, the ears were erect and the coats a deep red brown colour. The teeth had not erupted through the gum and they could spit and growl. Once they were left alone they uttered a shrill bird-like call, not unlike a Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus*. This call was used to communicate until the animal left at 10 months old.

The male was hand-reared on cow's milk and a variety of meat once this could be consumed. He was completely free ranging and remained very tame. His mass was determined on a weekly basis when possible and the body measurements were taken at the same time. Body measurements taken after 14 weeks old had a margin of error of ± 10 mm. Shoulder height and heart girth were only measured at a later date. Mass was determined with the cat in a bag on a spring balance, and body measurements with a steel tape while being held.

Tooth eruption was difficult to determine because the animal disliked its mouth being opened. Hair colour changed with age and this was recorded.

Body measurements with increase in age are shown in Table 1. Increase in mass showed a close correlation with age and mass correlated well with other body parameters (Table 2).

The deciduous teeth appeared fully erupted at between four and six weeks old. At six weeks old the kitten was able to consume soft meat including a small bird. The permanent canines erupted at 25 weeks old and at one stage there were eight canines present. The deciduous canines only dropped out once the permanent canines were well erupted at between 26 and 27 weeks old.

The uniform brick red hair of the kitten was replaced by a paler reddish-brown colour by the age of 10 weeks old. At this age the eyes had become a yellow-lime

Table 1

Body growth of a male caracal kitten in the Mountain Zebra National Park

Age (wks)	Mass (kg)	BODY MEASUREMENTS IN MM					
		Tail	Ear	Hindfoot	Length	Shoulder	Girth
2	0,46	80	30	62	270	—	—
3	0,52	90	30	70	330	—	—
5	0,74	105	45	75	370	—	—
6	0,91	105	48	83	410	—	—
7	1,34	125	55	85	450	—	—
8	1,53	140	60	100	480	—	—
9	1,87	150	60	110	500	220	—
10	2,21	165	65	125	580	230	—
11	2,32	170	67	125	620	270	—
12	2,83	180	67	130	530	300	—
13	3,80	197	68	150	680	305	—
14	4,00	202	70	160	700	305	—
15	4,44	210	70	160	700	305	—
16	4,80	210	70	160	740	310	—
17	5,00	220	75	160	785	320	—
18	5,40	240	80	170	780	330	—
19	6,40	240	83	170	800	330	—
20	6,60	250	83	170	830	330	—
21	6,80	250	84	170	830	340	—
22	6,80	250	85	170	830	350	—
23	7,20	250	85	170	875	350	340
24	7,60	250	85	170	900	350	360
25	8,00	250	85	170	900	370	400
26	8,30	250	85	180	900	370	360
27	8,80	260	85	190	920	370	360
32	10,50	260	85	190	920	410	430
35	11,20	285	85	200	1000	410	430

Table 2

Correlation coefficients and linear regression formulae for various body parameters and age in a male caracal kitten

Mass	vs	Age (2 wks to 35 wks)	$r = 0,99$	$y = 1,41x-0,92$
Mass	vs	Tail length (2 — 20 wks)	$r = 0,97$	$y = 0,04x-4,09$
Mass	vs	Ear length (2 — 24 wks)	$r = 0,92$	$y = 0,13x-4,76$
Mass	vs	Hindfoot length (2 — 20 wks)	$r = 0,95$	$y = 0,05x-3,60$
Mass	vs	Girth (23 — 35 wks)	$r = 0,85$	$y = 0,04x-4,69$

green colour, and silver-white flecks of hair appeared on the rump. At 14 weeks old most of the body was covered in flecks of silvery-white hair.

The ears of the kitten were a uniform black on the dorsal surface. At 10 weeks old white hairs appeared amongst the black and by 21 weeks old there were prominent, almost pure white patches on the back of the ears. The ear tuft measured 20 mm at seven weeks old and 50 mm at 35 weeks old.