



## Wild Cats on Stamps of Armenia & Artsakh

By Greg Balagian

Republic of Artsakh is home to several members of cat family (*Felidae*). The largest and rarest is the Persian, or Caucasian leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*, or *Panthera pardus ciscaucasica*). It is the largest and endangered leopard subspecies with declining population of about 1200 individuals. Historically, the Persian leopard was distributed over the whole Caucasus, southern Anatolia, and Central Asia, except for steppe areas. Today, the largest population of 550 to 850 leopards survives in Iran, close to 300 live in Afghanistan, and about 90 in Turkmenistan. Also, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russian North Caucasus respectively, only 10 to 13 individuals survive, and less than 5 in Turkey, Georgia, and Republic of Artsakh.

The Caucasian, or Eastern Lynx (*Lynx lynx dinniki*), is a subspecies of the Eurasian lynx indigenous to Caucasus and Middle East (fig. 1). Its



Fig. 2

geographic distribution extends from Caucasus to Turkey, and east to northern parts of Iraq and Iran. Lynx in Armenia usually inhabit forested and rocky mountains. The Caucasian lynx is vul-

nerable throughout its range, especially in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. In Armenia and Republic of Artsakh the population of this beautiful felines also declining, but fortunately not as dramatically as elsewhere.

The Pallas's cat, or manul (fig. 2), is a small wild cat with a broad but fragmented distribution in the grasslands and steppes of Central Asia. One of its subspecies, (*Otocolobus manul ferruginea*), is found in parts of Armenia, Artsakh, Iran, and Azerbaijan.

One of subspecies of jungle cat, or chaus, (*Felis chaus chaus*), is a me-



Fig. 1



Fig. 3

dium-sized feline native to the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and southern China (fig.3). It is found in Caucasus, Armenia, Artsakh, Iran, Baluchistan, and Chinese Turkestan.

The Caucasian wildcat (*Felis silvestris caucasica*), Turkestan wildcat (*Felis silvestris caudata*), and African, or Near-Eastern wildcat (*Felis silvestris lybica*), are three wildcat subspecies found across Armenian Highlands (fig. 4). All three of them are currently listed as nearly threatened.



Fig. 4

Several of these felines appear on stamps of Artsakh. In 2009 Artsakh Post issued a set of three stamps with one of them depicting lynx with 100 dram denomination. Each stamp



Fig. 5

was also issued in a form of a miniature sheet of eight stamps with and image of animals on the stamp and gutter label. Unfortunately, the Latin taxonomical name for the lynx is wrong – *Felis lynx* instead of *Lynx lynx*. In 2013 Artsakh post issued a set of three stamps depicting various indigenous animals including Pallas's cat or manul with 750 dram denomination. The set was also issued in a form of a beautiful miniature sheet of four stamps. Sadly, the Latin name on this stamp also incorrect – *Felis manul* instead of *Otocolobus manul*. In 2018 in the set of three stamps there is a 70 dram stamp depicting Caucasian wildcat (*Felis silvestris*), and in 2020 in a set of two stamps the 200 dram stamp depicts jungle cat (*Felis Chaus*). Both stamps were also issued in a form of miniature sheets.



Fig. 6

It needs to be mentioned that Armenian post in 1996 and in 2019 issued as part of two different sets of two stamps a 60 (fig.5) and 330 (fig. 6) dram stamps depicting Caucasian leopard so all indigenous wild cats that are still found in Armenian Highlands represented on stamps of Artsakh and Armenia.

