

**Informationen zur Umwelt und für Naturreisende auf Kreta:**
Information about the Environment and for travellers in Crete:

Excursion to the grotto at *Ag. Paraskies* / Prefecture Iraklion **1996 rediscovered: the Cretan Wildcat (*Felis cretensis*)**

The grotto at *Ag. Paraskies* is located about 2.5 miles after the village towards *Apostoli – Kastelli* (after the branch towards *Voni*) within a left bend on the left side of the road. From the road well visible the grotto formation forms the dome of a karst hill (on the right side leads a path in the olive groves), on which are old stocks of olive trees. The Grotto is accessible via 2 accesses where the left entrance disembogues after around 7 metres in a creep gear which narrows after furthermore 2 metres and closes by loose sediment. The right entrance leads 9 metres into the mountain - and ends at a "dry stone wall". The dry stone wall, whose fitted stones are "brick" with clay, has a thickness of approx. 80 cm and has a size of 1.2 m width and 1.4 m height. Multiple smaller niches are in the karst rocks at left-hand side, which are blackened with soot at the top which suggest the use as "Sites for open fire". The age of the "wall" is impossible to date without more precise examination; also the question what is hidden behind it is (without its slapping¹) currently not to answer!

¹ An opening of the "wall" is allowed only with permission and on behalf of the *Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology-Speleology of S. Greece*



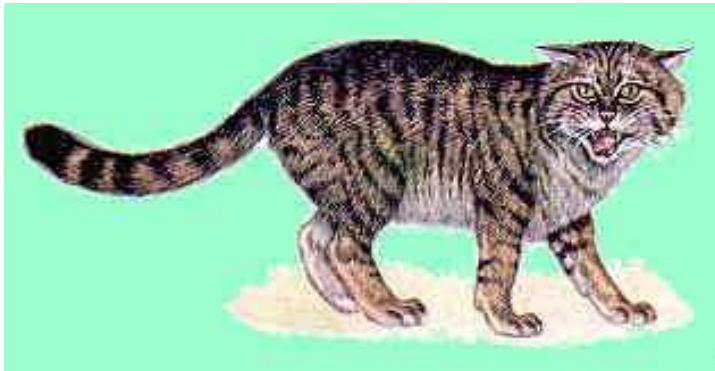
Figure on the left shows the karst cave from the perspective of the road. Entrance height is approximately 1.7 m. While the left entrance leads in a creep tunnel, ends the right entrance at a "dry stone wall" (see fig. right). Based on a first assessment the Grotto has been uncommitted in the last 30-50 years; even the usual waste landfill in the entrance area is missing!

Pictures: *H. Eikamp* (28.04.2003)

The Cretan Wildcat (*Felis (sylvestris) cretensis*), 1996 rediscovered!

In 1905 a British researcher team reported the existence of Wildcats in Crete and confirmed this by 2 coats that they had purchased on the market of Chania. Also some narratives of the locals relate to this animal, but lacked ensured evidence. It succeeded then in 1996 - Italian students could catch a Wildcat in the Ida Mountain!

The large animal fauna on Crete (and the other Mediterranean islands) with dwarf elephant and pygmy hippopotamus withstood verifiably until the past ice age. Till 9.000 Years ago the Cretan deer (*Candio-cervus creticus*) probably survived in addition to the above, as well as different other endemic mammal species, of these unfortunately preserved only remains, such as the Crete bezoar ibex (*Capra aegagrus*) and the Cretan Wildcat (*Felis (sylvestris) cretensis*). The latter would have been come to Crete approximately 5 million years ago, when a land connection to the neighbouring continents still exist. Another possibility is that it came with the Neolithic's, who first kept them as pets before they feral. Cats have been proven in the oldest Neolithic layers in Crete; interfere between desert-, steppe and wild cat, which talks for a long history.



The Wildcat reaches a size of 50-60 cm and a weight of 5-10 kg. The tail reaches a length of 25-35 cm; the coat colour varies depending on the habitat. Cats in dry, sandy areas are brighter than wild cats living in forest regions. Solitary they are active mainly at night. The gestation period is between 63-68 days. The brood usually consist 2-3 cubs; they leave the shelter after 4-5 weeks and are independently after 5 months. The wild cat eats small mammals, birds and insects.

She belongs to the relationship of African (Nubian) Wildcat (*Felis (sylvestris) libyca*), the strain of our house cat.

On the behaviour and lifestyle or the herd sizes of the Cretan wild cat is almost nothing known. The 1996 captive animal came from a wooded southern slope of the Ida Mountains and is until today the only known living proof of the existence of the Cretan wild cat

Remark: In literature the Cretan wild cat is also called *Felis sylvestris agirus*; also references to "breeding of population" can be read but not proofed.

For further details about [Felis \(sylvestris\) cretensis](#) as well as [Felis sylvestris](#) in general please see articles at Wikipedia

