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Authors: Kompanje, Erwin J. O., and Hermans, John J.

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Cephalopagus Conjoined Twins in a Leopard Cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*)

Erwin J. O. Kompanje,^{1,2,3} and John J. Hermans² ¹ Natural History Museum Rotterdam, PO Box 23452, 3001 KL Rotterdam, The Netherlands; ² Erasmus MC University Medical Center Rotterdam, Department of Radiology, PO Box 2040, 3000 CA Rotterdam, The Netherlands; ³ Corresponding author (email: e.j.o.kompanje@erasmusmc.nl)

ABSTRACT: Case reports of conjoined twins (“Siamese twins”) in wild mammals are scarce. Most published reports of conjoined twins in mammals concern cases in man and domestic mammals. This article describes a case of cephalopagus conjoined twins in a leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) collected on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, in the period 1873–76. A review of known cases of conjoined twinning in wild mammals is given.

Key words: Cephalopagus, conjoined twins, leopard cat, *Prionailurus bengalensis*.

Conjoined twins (“Siamese twins”) are well known in man, in domestic and laboratory mammals, domestic and wild birds, and in wild and captive-bred reptiles, amphibians, and fishes, but are very rarely described in wild mammals. The precise incidence is unknown, most likely due to high prenatal and antenatal mortality. Almost all known cases of conjoined twins in wild mammals concern unborn embryos and fetuses found during dissection of the pregnant dead females. The aim of this article is to describe and illustrate an additional case of conjoined twins in a wild mammal species.

Female conjoined twin fetuses of a leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) (Fig. 1) were collected at Atjeh on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia (0°00'N, 102°00'E) in the period 1873–1876. The specimen was preserved in 70% alcohol and sent to the National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, the Netherlands where it was stored in the collection (collection number RMNH 1485). In 1998, it was donated to the Natural History Museum Rotterdam (collection number 9990-00002574). Nothing is known about the circumstances under which the specimen, documented

as cephalopagus conjoined twins, was collected.

In summer 2003, a CT scan of the skeleton (Fig. 2) was made that showed a fused skull, two complete vertebral columns, and other skeletal parts. The skull looked normal, but the two foramen magnum pointed to fusion of two skulls.

Conjoined twins always are conjoined in one of eight sites (Spencer, 2000a, 2000b, 2003) and are named after the site of union: Thoracopagus (united ventrally at the chest); Omphalopagus (united ventrally at the abdomen); Cephalopagus (united ventrally at head and chest); Ischiopagus (united ventrally at the pelvis); Parapagus (united laterally [dicephalus; one body, two heads or diprosopus; one body, two faces]); Craniopagus (united at the heads); Pygopagus (united caudally); and Rachipagus (united dorsally at the spine). Spencer (2000a, 2000b, 2003) provides convincing evidence that symmetrical conjoined twins are the result of secondary fusion of two originally separate monovular embryonic discs, and are not the result of incomplete fission producing a partially separated zygote. The etiology of conjoined twins remains enigmatic.

In the classic symmetric case of cephalopagus, the large conjoined head has two identical faces (also named Janus or Janiceps, after the two-faced Roman god, or Octopus, for the eight limbs) looking out over the two pair of shoulders. Cephalopagus conjoined twins are fused ventrally from the upper top of the head down to the umbilicus, thus sharing head, neck, thorax, thoracic organs, and upper abdomen. Vertebral columns, lower abdo-



FIGURE 1. *Prionailurus bengalensis*, cephalopagus conjoined twins (NMR 9990-00002574).

men, genitalia, and all the limbs are usually separate.

The variable degree of laterality in fusion at the rostral aspect of the embryonic disc in a cephalopagus results in a graded series of cases (Spencer, 2003). These variations are: 1) symmetric ventral union, resulting in two complete faces (the classic cephalopagus); 2) moderate asymmetry of union, with diminished posterior face and brain, variable mouth, eyes, nose, and ears present; 3) severe asymmetry with complete absence of the posterior face (as is the described leopard cat); 4) extreme asymmetry, resulting in anen-

cephaly of the conjoined brain, either with one face or two laterally united faces on the same side, but with ventral union of the body down to the umbilicus; 5) maximal asymmetry, resulting in prosopothoracopagus with separate brains, but with ventral union of the trunks (Spencer, 2003).

These leopard cat conjoined twins had severe asymmetry in union, with complete absence of one face. In moderate asymmetric cephalopagus, otic remains are common, but in these leopard cat conjoined twins no trace of this was visible. The twins had, as usual in cephalopagus,

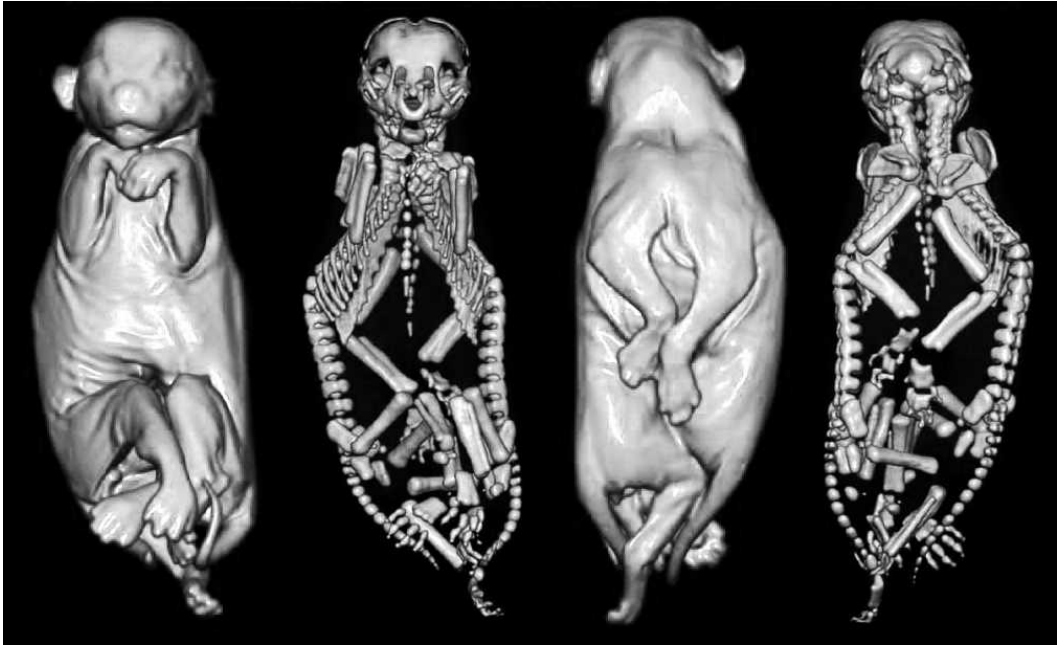


FIGURE 2. *Prionailurus bengalensis* cephalopagus conjoined twins (NMR 9990-00002574). Images from CT scanning. Posterior and anterior view.

two entirely separate vertebral columns up to the two foramen magnum in the fused skulls. The conjoined thorax had two shared sternums, each of the twins contributing a set of ribs on each side of each

sternum. All eight limbs were normally developed.

Cephalopagus conjoined twins probably result from fusion of the oropharyngeal membranes at the most rostral aspect of

TABLE 1. Published cases of conjoined twins in wild mammals.

| Reference | Species | Taxonomy | Age |
|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------|----------|
| Reisel, 1671 | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | Cephalopagus | Newborn |
| Jung, 1671 | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | Cephalopagus | Newborn |
| Seger, 1671 | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | Cephalopagus | Newborn |
| Mentzel, 1686 | <i>Alces alces</i> | Cephalopagus | Fetus |
| Winslow, 1734 | <i>Cervus elephas</i> | Parapagus diprosopus | Newborn |
| Neugebauer, 1851 | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | Cephalopagus | Newborn |
| Benesch, 1957 | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | Cephalopagus | Newborn |
| Fay, 1960 | <i>Odocoileus virginianus borealis</i> | Parapagus dicephalus | Fetus |
| Daniel and Kershaw, 1964 | <i>Cervus elephas</i> | Parapagus dicephalus | Fetus |
| Kawamura, 1969 | <i>Balaenoptera borealis</i> | Thoracopagus | Fetus |
| Kawamura and Kashita, 1971 | <i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i> | Cephalopagus | Fetus |
| Kamiya et al., 1981 | <i>Stenella coeruleoalba</i> | Parapagus dicephalus | Fetus |
| Zinchenko and Ivashin, 1987 | <i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i> | Thoracopagus | Fetus |
| Faust, 1999 | <i>Lepus europaeus</i> | Cephalopagus | Newborn |
| Kompanje, 2001, 2005b | <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> | Parapagus dicephalus | Newborn |
| Faust, 2001 | <i>Cervus elephas</i> | Parapagus dicephalus | Fetus |
| Cesarini et al., 2002, 2004 | <i>Tursiops truncatus</i> | Parapagus diprosopus | Newborn |
| Kompanje, 2005a | <i>Rattus rattus</i> | Omphalopagus parasiticus | Adult |
| Kompanje, 2005a | <i>Erinaceus europaeus</i> | Pygopagus parasiticus | Subadult |

two early embryonic discs that share a single yolk sac. The primordial of heart and septum transversum are adjacent to the edges of these discs, resulting in involvement of union also.

Conjoined twins in wild terrestrial mammals have been very rarely reported. We could find only 19 cases in the scientific literature between 1671 and 2006 (Table 1). Spontaneous occurrence of conjoined twins in laboratory animals is uncommon; Szabo (1989) reported one rat conjoined twin on 10,000 and one rabbit conjoined twin in 4,000 offspring during 20 years.

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