

The Power of Pride

by [Lin Stone](#)

Cats, The Irresistible Pets



Cats have been fascinating mankind for thousands of years. The Egyptians were so fascinated with cats they deified them and let them do virtually anything at all that they wanted to. Pound for pound cats are nine times stronger than man and ten times as agile. With their whiskers turned out to guide them cats can slither through tunnels no wider than they are that twist and turn in every direction.

Our first cat was found in town at a service station. It was coal black. It came purring up to our legs with its tail standing straight up and its white whiskers quivering. "Can we have him?" we begged. Tom Harrison pushed his hat back and said, "Sure!" so fast Daddy didn't have a chance to say a word.

That black cat didn't like the car that much but we had it snuggled up in love so thick that before twenty miles had ticked away we had it purring again. By the time we got home it was asleep and we took it to bed with us. All night long we petted and loved on that cat. Finally we dozed off to sleep and that was the last thing we saw of that black cat.

When we woke up in the morning there was a pure white cat in bed with us. She was so white we named her Snowball. That cat was the huntingest cat I ever knew in my life. Many a day she would drag fifteen to twenty gophers home with her for us to see.

Gophers are vicious little rodents that dig holes deep in the fields. Those holes wash out when the water gets to them and the ditch breaks, the dikes cave in, and fields wash away. Farmers hate them. Farmers would pay a quarter for every gopher tail you brought them. A man's wages in those days was \$4.00 if you worked all twelve hours. Snowball earned a man's wages almost every day of her life.

Snowball would wait motionless except for her twitching tail until she was ready to pounce. Then she would roll forward on her feet so fast she was sailing through the air. Before the gopher knew there was danger anywhere around his neck was broken and she was dragging him home. Cats are proud of their killing powers and they want their owners to know how good they are so they bring their captured game home to show it off.

The ambush is the favorite means of hunting for most cats, especially where prey density is high and cover is readily available. There are two basic methodologies employed, the first by the solitary hunter and the second by two or more cats working together. In either case, the method is similar.

The lone cat will position itself (usually) under cover of vegetation or a natural feature, such as tree or overhang, overlooking a commonly used path of its intended prey. In forest locations, cats renowned for their climbing ability, such as the leopard, margay and clouded leopard will often wait in the lower branches of trees which overhang a trail. If an unsuspecting animal comes within striking distance the cat will break cover, lunging toward its startled victim. Tree-bound attackers will almost always jump to the ground before pouncing on their victim, however there are reports of the more agile cats jumping directly onto their prey.

In a variation of the ambush technique, the fishing cat will often position itself above an open area of water, on an overhanging branch or rock and wait for a fish to swim close to the surface. The cat will then dive head first toward the fish, catching it in its jaws. In southern Africa, the black-footed cat has been reported to lie in wait at the entrance to a burrow or hole of small ground-dwelling rodents, ambushing them as they leave.

Although the cat is generally thought of as a solitary hunter, some species adopt a co-operative ambush technique, in which a several cats act as 'beaters', moving openly toward an intended victim and driving it in the direction of another cat lying in wait, ready to pounce. This strategy has been observed in both Eurasian and Canadian lynx as well as the lion.

Cats have a keen sense of smell. Put a rotten piece of meat twenty feet up in a tree and they'll sense it as they come walking by. But when it comes to killing it is the cat's eye that is the most useful. Their eyes are developed in a number of ways that help in prey detection.

Whereas the human eye can detect movement in both the horizontal and vertical planes, the cat's eye is particularly sensitive to horizontal movements - it is able to spot the movement of its prey from a great distance. Special receptor cells in the cat's eye are particularly sensitive in low light conditions and enable a greater degree of 'night vision' than most men have. A cat can detect movement in approximately 20% of the light that would be required by a normal man.

When it comes to hearing it has been proven that a cat can hear sounds through a range approximately three times that of the human ear and as a result cats can hear much higher pitched sounds, such as those given off by small rodents and insects. This coupled with the fact that the cat's ear flaps -- or pinnae -- can rotate 180 degrees enable it to pinpoint with great accuracy the source of even the faintest sound.

Once spotted, prey has first to be caught and then killed - to do this the cat has specialized limb/muscle combinations which balance the need for speed and agility in the chase with a requirement for power and strength in holding down and killing its stricken prey. The teeth and jaw muscles of a cat are also specially developed.

Unlike other carnivores the wild cat has only 28 or 30 teeth, due to the fact that they have a shortened jaw but this in turn provides a stronger and wider bite. The canine teeth of a cat are generally larger and stronger than those found in other carnivores, which help in the effectiveness in biting through the spine at the nape of the neck. They use this deadly bite to dislocate the vertebrae - or from the front to damage the victim's trachea.



I remember one time we discovered that a cat gone wild had a litter of kittens hidden inside a flume that ran under the road. I was elected to stand at one end of the flume while some other kids used a stick to flush the little kittens out.

"When they come out just grab them around the neck and hold on."

It was a simple plan and therefore certain to work. They began jamming a stick into the flume and made an awful racket. Sure enough I could hear the kittens tumbling over each other to get out through the end I was hovering over.

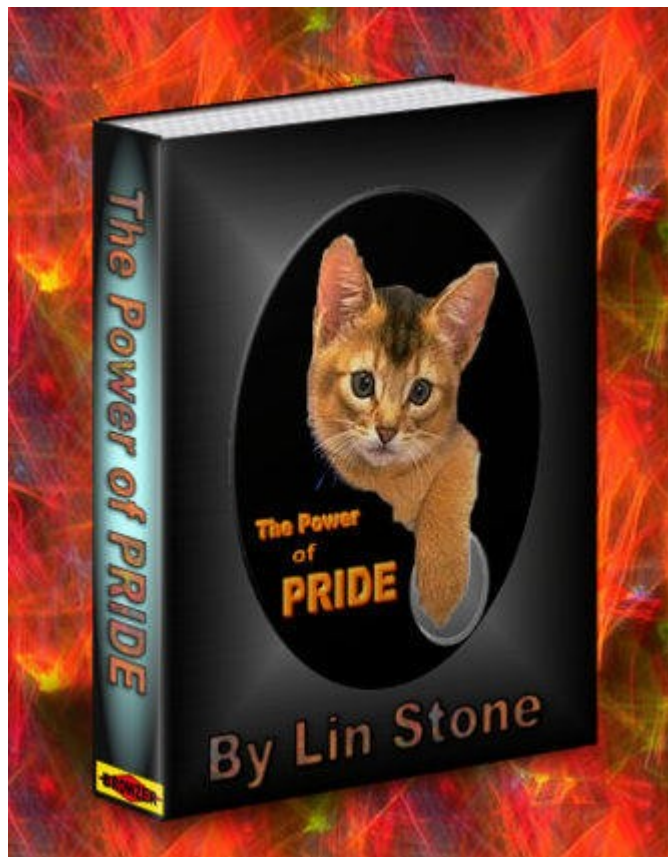
As the first kitten emerged my hands streaked forward and I grabbed it around the neck and began giggling at making the catch so easily. In a matter of seconds the situation had reversed and I was the one captured. The cat twisted around inside its skin and fastened its teeth on my exposed thumb.

Those teeth were so sharp they went right through my thumb. I dropped all pretense of holding onto my prey but the little kitten maintained its hold upon my thumb. Frantic with pain I slung it back and forth to send it sailing and it still hung on. There was a post nearby and I rushed over to it to begin slinging the cat's body against it as hard as I could. Finally those little teeth let go and I escaped.

It is a well known fact that pound per pound cats are nine times stronger than a man. The way I calculate it, that little kitten must have weighed at least thirty pounds!

The first time Don Jackson dropped a little thirty pound tiger cub into my lap unexpectedly I remembered that little kitten -- and I fainted.

Thirty pounds is a whole lot of cat to find suddenly within striking distance of your jugular. A bob cat – or a wild cat – can bring a deer down in the wild. A catamount or cougar can bring a cow down. Knowing all this esoteric information it is little wonder then that when that little tiger cub opened its mouth I was only too glad to stuff it full of a calf's milk bottle. "They eat before we do," said Don.



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When i came to Turpentine Creek to do a story I had to bring my dog Hooch with me. I couldn't leave him at home in the yard because he would break his chain and get loose. I'm not talking a dog chain I'm talking the kind of chain you tow cars with. I couldn't leave him in the house because Hooch would bust a window wide open and get out. When Hooch got out no cat within fifty miles was safe; Hooch was a bona fido cat killer. So, I brought Hooch with me to [Turpentine Creek](#) to do a story on big cats and the people who love them.

That was when Don Jackson invited me to supper and dumped the baby tiger in my lap. Don was a big man and that was his idea of a great big joke. After a few minutes of deathly silence I laughed too.

Then -- and now -- Turpentine Creek provides people with a way to get close to the big cats. People pay good money for the privilege of sleeping in the same room with tigers, lions, panthers and what have you. It isn't that hard to buy a tiger of your own but the fact of the matter is it is much easier to let professionals do the raising and you just come to visit once in a while.

So the next morning after breakfast, and after Don and his guests had wrestled with the tiger cubs, he and I sat down for a moment and I explained about the problem I was having with Hooch killing cats. "When we came in he could smell cats and he is just going nuts in the van wanting to get out."

Don grinned and said he could break Hooch of that. "Just let me take him inside the cat compound with me. One look at a real cat and you won't ever have another problem with Hooch."

I tried to explain how strong Hooch was but Don shushed me. "I handle nine hundred pound lions and tigers and pound per pound, cats are nine times stronger than men are; I can handle your dog."

It's a shame how easily I let myself be persuaded but Don was volunteering -- and like he said, he was a big, strong man. I crossed my fingers and hoped he could handle Hooch.

We got Hooch out of the van and he was trembling with excitement because the cat smell was thick and heavy in the morning air. Don Jackson took the nylon leash in his hands and I got my camera out to record this historic event.

The compound had not officially opened up yet so Don took us in through the trailer-office. Hooch was prancing along through the trailer with his healthy coat gleaming. As I remember it Hooch was straining at the leash a little bit, hoping to get in there with the cats.

Out in the compound we went, and Hooch perked up immediately, smelling cats everywhere. He was happy. His tail was wagging behind him, his ears were up, his eyes were shining bright. In short, Hooch did not suspect a thing.

Don led him straight to the biggest tiger there. This tiger is so big he can stand on his hind feet and make a mark nine feet high with his nose. That cat was so big it took Hooch two looks before he suddenly realized what kind of animal he was looking at.

His head began shaking as if he were having a bad dream.

A cat?

A cat? THAT big?

Every hair on him turned straight out. Hooch, hunkered low, and he growled. This tiger stood up on his hind feet right in front of Hooch. Nine feet tall of him this tiger stood.

Braver dogs than Hooch would have run from a tiger that big.

But I garanteeya couldn't none of them have run as fast as Hooch ran.

Hooch had been standing beside Don when the panic started. Hooch was standing there when the tiger began to rear up. Hooch was gone before the tiger got all the way up. He was gone so fast that he jerked Don plumb around in the other direction and ripped the nylon leash right out of his hand, taking a good strip of his hand with it.

Hooch was heading for anywhere called gone.

Hooch saw an opening beneath the trailer house and lunged into it, picking up speed as he went.

The only problem is, that trailer house is part of a retaining wall. It curves around.

Following the path of least resistance, Hooch was going so fast he didn't even realize he had come full circle right back out into the compound.

Suddenly the truth of it dawned on him.

He was right back in there with that tiger. Hooch stopped dead still. Every hair on him went straight out again. Hoping to intimidate the tiger, Hooch hopefully whispered, "woof"

It wasn't a loud "woof" but somehow it seemed to pierce to the very core of certain sensitive hearing systems because that's when every tiger and every lion and every panther in that joint woke up. There was a sudden concerted rustling on all four sides of Hooch as they came to attention. Even back then there were over 60 tigers and lions living there. Challenging roars rattled on poor Hooch's ears from every direction.

His legs flew out from under him and Hooch was on his belly. Hooch was crawling, scrawling, even whining in his eagerness to get out of there. He wanted to be just as far away from there as he could get.

Finding traction at last, he came to his feet and lunged towards the trailer house once more. Even though I was chuckling hard I managed to grab the leash as he went by.

That was a mistake that jerked the chuckles out of me. Don couldn't hold him and Don wrestled tigers nine feet tall. It was all I could do to keep my feet as Hooch headed for the trailer and jerked me along with him. Hooch is big and Hooch is strong. Hooch can run thirty three miles an hour when he's pulling me on my bicycle. I didn't have a bicycle under me that day. Have you ever tried to keep your feet under you when you're being yanked forward at thirty three miles an hour? It's almost impossible.

In my mind's eye I could see Hooch going under the trailer again, and then back out again, right in the middle of those tigers one more time. Oh, it was going to be so funny! I was still gathering strength to laugh about the coming event when the door opened and a secretary peered out to see what all the roaring was about.

That was her mistake. Hooch hit her right in the belly, flattened her, and kept on making scratching motions with his feet as he hunted for more traction to speed him on his way out of danger.

We were moving so fast I couldn't even let loose of the leash. If my feet missed that secretary's belly as I went over, it was an accident. As fate would have it, another secretary was just opening the front door of the trailer as we came tearing through the hall way. Hooch saw daylight, and Hooch went sailing through that door too .

To avoid hurting that secretary too I dropped the leash and let him go. When I got to the van Hooch was scratching hard on the door, whining piteously to be let in. I was laughing pretty hard as I leaned forward and opened the door for him. Hooch dived under the middle seat. His nose was in the far corner, and his hind claws were digging to get him farther in.

Don, poor Don. He came out and showed me his hand. A large strip of flesh had been ripped right out of his palm. It looked awful and must have hurt much worse. It wasn't at all hard to imagine his eyes were moist but Don was a big boy; he was not crying like I would have been. "What can I do to make up for this?" I asked him bravely.

"Well," he replied. "Let me try it one more time and I think we can cure him. You owe me that much."

Well, you know how it is; a debt is a debt.

So, that's just what we did. Not as easily said as done, of course. But we done it. Don is big. Don wrestles nine hundred pound tigers. But it still took both of us to drag that dog back out of the van.

When Hooch realized WHERE we were dragging him TO, Hooch went berserk. There was no way we could drag that dog back inside to meet his fate. No sir! Hooch was not going.

He only weighed about a hundred pounds. I picked him up and carried him. Once I had him locked up in my arms so he couldn't get any traction Hooch turned to begging, licking my face, whining piteously.

Heartless wretch that I am, I told Hooch that this scientific cure was all for his own good, and back inside we went. Making sure that Don was ready for him, I handed Hooch to him on the leash.

Away we went --

and THAT time, I got a picture!



The next day I was about half a mile from there with Hooch running along right beside me, exploring the rugged terrain Turpentine Creek calls their back yard. His tail was wagging, his ears were up, his eyes were bright and the whole world was singing for him.

All of a sudden, Hooch stopped dead still in his tracks. Every hair on him turned straight out, and ZOOM, Hooch was gone.

I got my compass out and glanced at it.

Yep. He was heading straight for the van.

Then I looked around and spotted what had spooked him. It was just a small pile of scrapings from the tiger's pen -- but it was big enough to make a coward out of Hooch.

I can hear you asking... Did this brief episode cure Hooch from his cat-killing frenzy? Well, I can't keep the cat in the bag. Let me tell you what happened when we got home and Hooch saw his first little cat. They met unexpectedly, up close and personal, nose to nose.

Hooch saw the cat, and Hooch stopped dead still. Quivering even as he backed away he watched it real close to see if it was going to grow any bigger. Without waiting for evidence to the contrary he turned, and Hooch ran back to the van just as fast as he could go.

That cat is probably bragging about it to this very day.

Dogs and cats don't mix as a general rule, but that's because cats – usually being the smaller of the two adversaries – runs like a scairdy cat – and that is the wrong thing do. There are few living beings on this earth that can resist a temptation trying to get away from them.

A cat running away from a dog ([or a water buffalo](#)) is vulnerable. They can be killed easily if the dog (or pack of dogs) is bigger. But I have seen one ordinary house cat get chased into the space under a trailer stairs and decide to defend himself. When they came out the dog was yelping in terror and the cat was sitting astride the dog's neck with one front claw on each of the hound's ears as if he was guiding a race horse. I believe the dog could have out run a race horse that day because they were out of sight in just a few seconds.

Back in the good old days, as if there were such a thing, Nath and WR came into the house one day and saw Grandma's cat sneaking into their bedroom. That was WR's big chance and he took one quick step forward and slammed the door behind the cat. Then he ran to get the horse whip.

When he came back WR gave his instructions: "I'm going in there to give that cat a lesson he'll never forget about coming into our room. You lock the door behind me and don't you open it up to let that cat out for love nor money."

Nath was reluctant but he finally agreed. WR leaped into the room and Nath locked it behind him. He could hear the whip singing and he could hear the cat meowing piteously. "He's under the bed," WR complained angrily.

The bed was shoved aside and the horse whip popped a few more times. Nath strained hard but he no longer heard the cat crying.

He put his ear to the door and heard the whip pop two more times. There was a different sound to it somehow that puzzled him. Then the door knob rattled. "Nath, Nath, open the door."

Nath was afraid to. "Huh uh," he said. "The cat would get out."

The bed moved and the whip popped a few times. Then the door shook on its hinges. "Nath! Nath! Open the _____ door!"

The situation was a little bit scary. The tenor of WR's voice almost had a whine to it, like he was begging. Poor Nath was so startled he could not respond promptly. For the third time WR cried out. "Nath! Nath!" Then the door paneling splintered and WR came hurtling out of the room as if the devil was after him.

He was running so fast the cat couldn't catch him.

Nath always claimed there was a moral to that story, but he never could quit laughing long enough to tell us what it was.

I always tried to improve cats in my own little world. One day when Mama was gone I captured our pure white cat and tie-dyed its tail seven different rotating colors of the rainbow. I was almost exalted, looking at the results. Nothing would do me but I had to leash the cat and parade it down the busy street with its tie-dyed tail sticking straight up in the air.

If Mama hadn't been so busy whipping hell out of me she could have won lots of money capturing that inspired beauty on film. I told her the camera was RIGHT there, and she still ignored the opportunity to make us rich.

Wild Cats



The next step up in size in the cat world are a breed of cat variously known as wildcat, wild cat, bobcat, bob cat, lynx, or lynx cat. Even though they don't share the family name in scientific circles, the wildcat is a distinct species in the Lynx genus.

When the Canadian lynx and the bobcat are forced to share some of the same territory, they never really seem to mix. Like cardinals and blue jays they seem to sense a significant difference between themselves and their cousins.

Scientists believe the bobcat is more closely related to the Eurasian and Spanish Lynx, that they say spread into North America from Asia earlier than its Canadian relative. It is thought that the original American bobcats were much larger than at present and have perhaps reduced in size as a result of competition with early puma (mountain lion) species, so as to take advantage of a different niche in the predatory food chain.

Seen side by side with the Canadian lynx, your good old American bobcat is generally smaller and it can be further differentiated from the lynx in a number of other ways. For one thing, the bobcat has less pronounced ear tufts and cheek ruffs. It has a dark tip covering only the top of its 'stumpy' tail. Its feet are much smaller too, perhaps because it isn't as used to stalking game in deep snow most of the time. Then too, its fur has more pattern and color variations.

The wild cat's fur color ranges from light gray, through yellowish brown and all the way to reddish brown with markings that vary from 'tabby' stripes to heavy spotting. However, I also saw one that was totally black. The only thing that distinguished it from a panther was the distinctive shape of the wildcat and its size.

The wildcat has a great liking for rabbit meat. Rabbits are easier for bobcats to catch than hares are because rabbits prefer to live in thick brush where they can hide. That preference makes them perfect prey for the lurking bobcats and consequently, rabbit meat can form a major part of the bobcat's diet.

Out in the wild your bobcat will catch just about anything from a panting lizard to a dozing deer. Wide awake deer are easier for them to bring down during the winter when snow can hinder a deer's movements. Bobcats also prey on other small mammals, such as squirrels and chipmunk, rodents and birds. You can run into a bobcat out hunting both night and day, although there is some evidence to suggest that most hunting takes place at dawn and dusk. They can make short work of climbing a tree so glance upwards occasionally as you go gliding through their territories.

Three varieties of lynx cats are known to exist: Canadian, Eurasian (living in Turkestan and Central Asia), and Iberian (living in the Mediterranean region) lynx. Those lynx in North America are thought to have descended from Eurasian ancestors during the Pleistocene real estate era. With its dense fur and wide paws the lynx is highly adapted to deep snow. Consequently, they are well suited for the cold northern winters they prefer. Nowadays lynxes are found in Canada, Alaska, in the Cascades Range, the Rocky Mountain Range, and Great Lakes Region.

Over in Europe lynxes are found in Spain and Portugal. The lynx cat prefer to inhabit boreal forest ecosystem (taiga), sub alpine forest, tundra, southern plains and coastal regions along the Atlantic, deserts, and rocky areas. As I said, the lynx cat species includes the wildcat or what is called a bobcat, as well as three other sub-species.

The earliest fossil records scientists have dug up of the modern felid ancestors come from a real estate boom period they say existed just under 10 million years ago. These early descendants of the lynx first appeared around 4 million years ago and is known as the Issoire Lynx. This early lynx was larger than the forms found alive today and is said more to resemble those species from the genus felis, notably in having shorter legs than the lynx leaping around us today.

At first glance the lynx tends to look much like domestic cats, except it is larger. Often, at least in populated areas, these wildcats will win the battle to breed with domestic cats. The offspring are a combination of domestic and wild traits. The mixed-breed cats are often longer and lower to the ground than most domestic cats. Their faces are also more pointed and their mannerism more timid.

Daddy had one such offspring and it looked just like a bobcat and it was almost as big after it was grown. Daddy named him Bobby.

You could never tell for sure what Bobby was going to do when he met up with a dog. Sometimes he would leap for a tree and scramble to the topmost branch for safety, quivering in fear and meowing for the firemen to show up and help him down. At least once he turned a pack of ten mangy dogs around on their heels and sent them scrambling for home with trails of blood streaking out behind them.

Bobby was unpredictable in many ways. Sometimes he would just sleep on the television if it was warm enough for him, and sometimes he would invoke the law of imminent domain and claim a large spot in the middle of the master's bed as his own. Any place he laid his head it was not a good idea to try moving him until both of his eyes opened all the way up naturally. Even then it was usually best to open a tuna fish can and invite Bobby to follow you to his feeding station.

Quite often, by the time he finished feeding Bobby would have forgotten exactly where he had managed to get in your way.

A friend of mine named William had his own version of Bobby. In fact, his name was Bobby too. His tail was short and his tail was kinked and he was as big as any wildcat I've ever seen prowling the woods. William's Bobby was even more unpredictable than Daddy's Bobby. William had three good sized boys that were known far and wide as formidable scrappers but when Bobby decided his rights had been infringed upon it was the three boys that fled the house, not dear old Bobby.

Real wildcats were thick where I grew up and I made an intimate acquaintance with many of them in the wild. One time a friend of mine named Jim took me out hunting bottles with him. He went one way and I went another and we were supposed to meet up at a certain place. As I came up close to the meeting area I heard Jim hissing loudly.

It was a real peculiar sound and I crept cautiously over the hill until Jim was in plain view. There, brushing up against his legs like a common house cat was this wildcat. It was so big his neck was rubbing against Jim's knees and Jim is a big boy. I've been in some dense brush with wildcats before and they have never bothered me so I came on down to greet this one with little trepidation. Jim's eyes were wide already and getting wider. "I think he must be rabid."

This cat was definitely not behaving in a normal manner for a fact. Still yet, I was undaunted and pressed closer with a mountain lion's scream spitting from my mouth to scare it off.

This Bobby did not scare worth a hoot. This Bobby quit rubbing his back up against Jim's knees and started rubbing his back up against my knees – just like some young house cat looking for a handout.

"Go get the truck and come back to get me," I hissed at Jim.

Every second Jim was gone I worried about being bitten and scared to death of going through the agony those needles in the navel that go with being bitten by a rabid animal. The cat backed up just a bit when Jim finally arrived and I leaped unhindered into the truck. As we sped away the cat was plainly disappointed that his play pretties had decided to leave him.

Since then I have wondered several times if we had somehow run into William's Bobby because not long before that he had been forced by his little wife to remove that pet from their house after he mauled one of their boys pretty badly.

Where your mountain lion (or cougar) maintains a personal territory of about 50 square miles regardless whether it is living in desert, mountain or forest your common bobcat or lynx cat's home range can vary from 8 to 800 square miles, depending on the animal's gender, the season, the abundance of prey in the area, and the density of its competitive population.

Up north, in the wild, lynx cats are known to travel extremely long distances, especially when the snowshoe rabbit (a hare by the way) population declines -- or when your cat just decides to establish a new home range for itself. These long distance movements ensure a natural diversity in the breeding stock through exchange of genes.

Perhaps for that very reason their individual ranges do tend to overlap, particularly between sexes. But then, the males are hardly ever aggressive with each other. They prefer to practice a peace treaty simulating mutual avoidance.

When lynx cats are young they may not have a personal territory at all and are usually transient or dispersing, searching for unoccupied habitat.

Bobcats – in turn -- are found all the way up into Canada -- in forests in the north, swamp areas in and around Florida, and desert and scrubland in the southwestern states of the US.

They are however usually absent from the highly cultivated areas of the mid northern states. Despite its smaller size, the bobcat is also thought to be more aggressive than your common lynx.

A lot of people decide to make a pet out of a baby bobcat that they catch in the wild at a suitable time. While very young they are very cute and very cuddly and they appreciate the loving touch of a human's hand. Just as I've pointed out before, bobcats do tend to grow more aggressive as they grow older. A lot of that springs from their natural desire to have LARGE areas to roam in. Being confined inside a small house or large apartment does not naturally appeal to them and they resent having to share their territory with human beings constantly. In short, bobcats (wildcats or lynx cats) can become more dangerous at any time as they grow older.

[Benny Anderson](#) insists that the best way to catch a young bobcat is to put a raw piece of chicken or slice of meat about three inches under the ground. Cover that bait with sticks, grass and loose dirt that lets the smell escape. A net that falls over the scene at an appropriate moment, or a spring trap that snaps shut on a tender foot, makes the trap complete. Lynn Cool used a live catch trap big enough to catch anything as big as a mountain lion while cowboys with more guts than brains will simply rope their quarry.

If you do capture yourself a baby bobcat and decide to raise it by hand you could find yourself with a companion animal that will give you many years of assorted joys. Just remember, they are natural predators and they are constantly armed with pointed teeth and very sharp claws.

This makes them unstable to be around small children who cannot be trusted to show good judgment. My grand daughter (for example) likes to chew on a cat's hind leg. She cannot be convinced that the cat's struggles to get away are anything less than wildly entertaining. Bobcats are not going to stand for that kind of game very long. If you have young family members, or if you are contemplating starting a family, you probably need to pass on finding, purchasing, or adopting a bobcat to raise.

Another thing to consider is that many state Game and Fish or Natural Resource Departments strictly regulate the ownership of bobcats. You can buy yourself a tiger, or a lion, etc., with ease, but bobcats? They have been accorded natural American citizenship and they have different rights.

In any event, before bringing a bobcat into your home, take time to consider every aspect of keeping a wild animal contented and happy. It will require a good deal of your time to create a loving relationship so the cat trusts you enough to let you pick it up from an abrupt awakening. No kind of cat is ever completely domesticated, not even your little domestic house cat.

Knowing that all the attributes of a wildcat are lurking always within that beast's allegedly little brain and it may suddenly decide to escape at any moment might be something to keep foremost in your mind. Any time they bite too hard a sharp slap to the snout makes a good cue for them to "soft bite." But by and large it is YOU that must prepare yourself completely before your cute little cuddly kitten arrives in the house.

Bobcat kittens can be hand reared starting at about 14 days old – or shortly after their eyes have opened. They will be agreeable to nursing from a bottle until eight weeks to twelve weeks of age. Bottle-feeding is a psychologically important activity for these felines. They'll put their furry little front feet up and almost pull the bottle towards them.

The milk formula should be a quality product like KMR or Milk Matrix 33/40 with additional calcium and vitamins. Atwoods and places like that will have it in stock for you. If not your local veterinary office staff can order it for you. When the kitten reaches 5 to 6 weeks, you should begin making something similar to Iams Kitten formula canned meat diet available to the kitten along side the milk mixture. The weaning process will be complete when the kitten refuses to cuddle with the bottle any longer.

Even the kittens of your bigger cats, when raised right with dogs or puppies or domestic cats, will develop friendships with them. It's meeting the dogs and cats they don't know that can initiate the trouble. Just imagine Hooch's reaction if HE met a strange tiger.

It appears that wildcats are all more socially oriented than we had previously thought. Although none of the other wildcat species show such levels of communal living as the lion, cheetah and feral domestic cat, there are many other examples of social interaction that have been observed during field studies of wildcats in recent years.

Group hunting has also been observed in the Eurasian and Canadian lynx, where the technique of ambush, similar to that used by the lion, is often employed. With many cats group hunting also plays an important part in the raising of young cubs or kittens - here when the offspring are old enough, they will often join the female in the hunt for prey, thus learning the important skills that they will need later in life to insure their survival.

On the whole, bobcats generally do well in the house, aside from leaping upon the kitchen cabinets in a single bound, shredding the hapless furniture or playing in the toilet. Just like little skunks, bobcat kittens will feel this irresistible urge to use a litter box naturally and hardly ever miss the potty until they reach sexual maturity, at which time their toilet habits do change. It is very important to spay or neuter your bobcat (or bigger) pet quite a while before it reaches adulthood if you plan to continue allowing it access to the inner sanctum of your home.

A wildcat is at its most vulnerable when young and is at risk itself from other predators, which may even included other species of larger cat. Here again, the coat as camouflage come into play - many species of wild cat, even those who have uniform coloration in adulthood, display darker spotted markings as cubs or kittens, as can be seen with the Lion, which does not fully lose its spots until young adulthood.

Many species of wildcat also have a waterproof element to their fur. This allows them to stay relatively dry in climates that might see rain for many days at a time. Like the coat of Belted Galloway cows the wild cat's fur gets wet, but the skin underneath remains protected.



History of the Big Cats

It is now commonly believed that the jaguar and leopard both share a common ancestry, centered in Eurasia a little over 2 million years ago. However where as the leopard spread west into Europe the early jaguar traveled east and crossed the Bering land bridge into North America. The early jaguars that inhabited the Americas were both larger and longer legged than the modern species.

Ancestral tigers were thought to have originated from Central Asia and China and spread out both east and west to cover most of Asia from the Caspian Sea to the Russian Far East. It is thought that the modern day tiger, found in northern China is perhaps the closest direct ancestor of the earliest forms of the species.

Fossil records show that the lion appeared on the scene considerably more recently than the other members on the genus Panthera. The earliest known records date back to around 750,000 years ago and stem from Western Africa. From here lions spread north into Asia and Europe, were the Cave lion and Tuscan lion were found in the Balkans and Northern Italy respectively. The ancestral lion also crossed from Asia into North America and the American lion spread south as far as Peru.

Early forms of the cheetah are also believed to have inhabited North America as far back as 2 1/2 million years ago. The early form, *Acinonyx pardinensis* found in Europe, closely resembled the modern day cheetah apart from being noticeably larger.

How does Cat Hair Rate?

Human beings have eyes geared to noticing an infinite number of hues and shades but even trained hunters can miss seeing cats poised for the killing pounce. Even when they are in wide open spaces cats are hard to see.

That's because the base color of any cat's fur is similar to that of the habitat in which it is found - the yellow/brown of the Lion matches the coloring of the savannah grasslands and the sandy colored coat of the Sand Cat is the color of its desert surrounding. In habitats that are less uniform in color, such as scrubland, woodland and dense forest, the coat markings of species found in such locations tend to become more pronounced.

Striped markings make the shape of a cat less easy to define in grasslands, while spots and rosette markings act in a similar fashion in varying light and shade of woodland and forest.

Regional differences in markings can be observed within a single species. The Serval found in much of central and southern Africa, tends to have larger spots which coalesce into stripes along its back in the open savannah and grasslands, while those found in less open surroundings, such as woodland and forest, have smaller spots more densely grouped. Such variation is common in cats that have large geographical ranges - the Leopard, Lynx and various Wildcat species all exhibit varying intensities of coat coloration and marking -- depending on the GPS of their territory.

Many species of cat rely on their powers of concealment as a prime weapon of survival. This is where the spots, stripes and coloring we find so beautiful serves a vital purpose. The length and relative thickness of a cat's fur is referred to as pelage. The fur of the big cats has long held our attention because of its sheer beauty -- especially when stretched out over a favorite couch or chair in the living room. It is thick and soft.

The pelt peels off easily under the skilled hands of a professional trapper with a knife. Some have adjusted to modern technology and make a small puncture hole in the throat. There they insert a blast of high pressure air completes the separation of church and state in a matter of minutes.

For those who prefer to leave their cats healthy and alive while still enjoying the beauty and softness available to them there is an alternate method available. My friend Jan keeps special colored cats in her home and collects every stray hair they release. With her trusty spinning wheel Jan first converts that stray cat hair into colorful yarn then uses that yarn to create the products of her choice.

To the cat that wears it, that luxurious pelt of fur offers some very tangible benefits, one of which is protection from the harsh elements of mother earth. A cat's heavy pelt can provide shelter from harsh winter cold and from the searing heat of blistered deserts.

The exact thickness of the various pelts is dependent to a degree, upon the environment in which the cat lives. The Snow Leopard who lives in generally mountainous habitats, has a long, woolly fur which serves to insulate it against the extreme cold - it is also markedly longer on the animal's belly, thus providing extra protection to that part of the body closest to the snow covered ground. The Lynx, who inhabits the cold northern lands, also displays a longer coat as well as distinctive hairy 'breeches' which cover its legs and paws, giving the cat extra protection as it moves through soft snow.

Interestingly, long fur does not always protect against the cold - the Black-Footed and Sand Cats both have longer fur covering their feet and foot pads - this is said to give them insulation against the heat of the ground in their desert habitats. As a general rule though, cats that inhabit colder climates have soft, long fur pelts and those in warmer climates have bristly, short fur pelts. The fur pelt offers insulation in both climate extremes. Beautiful and functional. What more could you want in a fur covering?

Melanism

Just as the sun was setting one night I swooped down into a swale and my headlights scooped up a huge black cat. It stood unmoving for a few seconds even after I stopped. Because it was black I thought it must be a black panther. But I picked up on the form of a wildcat immediately. It was extra big, but definitely a wildcat both in the way it was shaped and in the way it moved.



Several people have assured me since then I had been hallucinating and as memory grew dim I protested less and less. But when I began researching this book the black bobcat popped up immediately. I wasn't the only person to have seen one.

The term 'Black Panther' is quite often used in connection with large black cats seen slinking through the countryside - however there is no one distinct species of cat called a Black Panther. Over the years it has become used as a common name that can be applied to any large, black-coated cat. When you see a picture of a Black Panther it is most likely that you are looking at either a leopard or jaguar with Melanistic coloration.

The term Melanistic is derived from the word 'melanin', a dark colored skin and hair pigment. In cats, melanism results in the fur of the animal being very dark or black in color. In many cases the usual markings of the animal can still be faintly seen through the dark fur, especially from certain angles in bright sunlight.

Melanism is thought to occur because of a mutation or abnormality of one of the cat's genes that is associated with coat coloration and markings.

Melanism is thought to be hereditary, but it is not necessarily passed directly from one generation to the next - it is therefore quite common to see 'mixed' litters with one black cub along side normally colored brothers and sisters. Melanism can also occur in other species of wild cat - black coated caracal, Geoffrey's cat, margay, the bobcat like the one I saw, ocelot, jaguarundi and even serval have been noted in the smaller cats as well as occasional mention of the coloration in the larger lion, tiger and cougar.

That said, it is still a truth that melanistic leopards are more commonly found in dense tropical rain forest of S.E Asia. Here it is thought that the dark coloration acts as better camouflage in the low sun light conditions of the forest floor, giving the cat an advantage in hunting. If this is the case, it is also possible that a black leopard will also be at an advantage in being able to provide more food for its young and as a result this improves the probability of the melanistic gene being transferred through the population.

Okay, let's move up a step – well no, let's take a catty-cornered step – and look at **The Marbled Cat**. This breed of cat is identified as [the big cat -- that isn't big at all](#). It is in fact only slightly larger than a domestic cat.

Scientists place it in the same closely related group as the lion, tiger and leopard, the Subfamily Pantherinae. Even though it's much smaller than the clouded leopard it has the same long fangs and a very similar fur pattern.

Scientific examination of their blood (blood serum analysis) suggests that they are similar in form to the forest ancestors of the big cats some ten million years ago. However, they may have also decreased in size more recently due to competition with other big cats.

They are often overlooked in the category of big cats. The marbled cat may be found in the forests of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Borneo and some neighboring small islands.

Marbled cats make sounds similar to a domestic cat, but they purr only rarely and their meow is somewhat more like a twittering birdcall.

Marbled cats look similar to clouded leopards but they are smaller, they have shorter faces more like a domestic cat, and have a fuzzier tail. Its beautiful, striking coat is pale brown, with irregular slightly darker brown blotches sharply outlined in dark brown or black. Its long cylindrical tail is full from rump to tip and carries a continuation of its body pattern.

Marbled cats spend a great deal of time in the trees and it is likely that they catch much of their prey there, hunting birds, squirrels, rodents, frogs and reptiles. They have been seen hunting on the ground on the island of Borneo, and this may be a local habit. Not much is known about their other habits because they are rare even in the wild and there are no specimens currently kept in zoos.

The longest any marbled cat has ever lived in captivity was 12 years.

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Coming up Next
Is:
My Favorite Little Cat



The Catamount
The Puma, the Cougar,
the Panther or the Mountain Lion
The Cat of Many Names

I heard about the panther before I saw one. In fact, I also heard the mountain lion several times before I saw one. But from then on, we had the fun of meeting up face to face several times.

My adventure started with rumors floating in from three or four people who were supposed to be working at night. They would quit working and rush in to tell us about "an awful scream" that did various things to their anatomy. Daddy would go out looking for the animal disrupting service, but never found anything.

One night Daddy was working on a bull dozer (which is usually quite loud) and still heard that blood-curdling scream. Daddy stopped the dozer, got off and walked around in the dark trying to hear better so he could determine the direction he should go to find our mysterious terrorist. Even though the scream came several times the direction was constantly changing. Daddy determined to come home. He walked home alone in the dark.

After fetching his rifle Daddy had this brilliant idea of putting me out in front of him. When the thing attacked me, Daddy would shoot it. Before you condemn him for forming such a plan let me add that my daddy could drive nails into a pine plank from fifty feet away by shooting at the heads of the nails.

To make that matter all the more unbelievable, he used a short nosed H&R .22 revolver for this feat. It was nothing at all for Daddy to bring in a dozen rabbits after just an hour of shooting. Consequently, even though I was agitated with excitement, I did go out in the dark that night, and I went willingly.

I'm sure Daddy's idea was to use me for bait. But my idea was to find the animal for daddy and then get out of the line of fire. Even pure faith has some limits.

The first scream I heard came from in front of me. That scream was that of a professional killer. It nailed my courage dead center. I sank to the ground and shuddered. My tears were rather urgent when Daddy's voice hissed at me. "Go home. I don't need you."

Well, it was easy to know why and that knowledge braced me up so much I crawled to my feet and whimpered for fifty feet or more as I stumbled along on my way home in the virtually total darkness. It is my fervent – but unverified – hope that Daddy used my retreat as bait for the animal. He never said, and though I heard the scream several times I never saw a thing.

Over the next few weeks the rumors came in thick and heavy. We lost half our crew whose reaction to that horrid sound sent them packing, and we hired some BRAVE men to take their places. Grown cows were being struck down during this time. The terrorist never returned to any kill.

The boss hired a professional hunter to come to try his luck. He first bragged about what he would do then began sleeping most of the day and disappearing most of the night. He never claimed to hear a scream. Had it not been for the carcass of the crime showing up in spite of his presence the hunter would fain have sworn there was no wild animal out there. Four days, five days later, he left.

Every type of bait had failed. Nobody had seen a thing. Not even Daddy had got off a shot. Strangely enough, I found the right bait and I was the first -- or second -- one to see the Catamount up close and quite personal. It happened on this wise.

In that region of Arizona tamarack trees grow up to forty feet tall. The limbs of this tree are big and liable to shoot out in any direction, then curve around. A young Indian and I decided to build a tree house in the tallest tree in a stand that stood about a thousand feet from the boss's house.

As night was coming on we had it almost finished, save for putting the roof into place. These pieces of tin we simply laid over the top just so we could spend the night out there.

I forget now what Ambrose brought back with him, but I brought back a can of lard. I had borrowed it from my mother without her knowing about it. I had also borrowed some fried chicken and some home made cookies, donated to the cause by an unknown donor who to this very day may still be wondering where they went.

The chicken was already fried but nothing would do me but to have a fire going so we could warm it up and pretend we had cooked it. Ah yes, the lard in the lard can was soon sizzling and we were having a high old time swaying almost dangerously up there in the tree top.

There was a full moon and we could see for miles. It seemed to us that we were the only ones alive left on the earth so far out and so far up were we situated. The fire was still going when we went to sleep.

I heard the scratching of some huge animal coming up the trunk of our tree. As I sat up my flesh was trembling so hard the hairs on the back of my neck were swaying back and forth so vigorously that I felt like I was in the middle of torrent.

Ambrose sat up too and crept to the open door of our tree house. The light from the sizzling lard can flickered in frenzied shadows across his face. As he gazed down the tree trunk to identify the source of sound reaching us I was astounded by how wide open his eyes could go. When I leaned over to see for myself what had so easily captured us IT screamed and Ambrose shrank back with a scream of his own: "It's a LION!"

Now, I want to swear I saw the lion too, but memory is hazy and I may have made that up. I do know that shortly after Ambrose shrank back, so did I. Before I could even start shaking in earnest my dear friend seized the burning, sizzling can of lard in his bare hands and hurled the fiery liquid down the tree trunk.

The screaming I had thought was so awful before was twice as eloquent at this time. Every organ in my body began producing an endless supply of moisture. But, if I was scared, Ambrose was brave enough to protect me from harm. Ambrose leaped to his feet, cast the roof off with one sweep of his arm, and then he DIVED out of the tree house. What a brave, death defying leap that was. Limbs cracked and splintered to mark his descent for me. Ambrose went down so fast he must have beat the lion to the ground. That being the case his immediate plans were to lead the lion away from me.

That's why I saw Ambrose sprinting across the dusty opening of ranch headquarters in the fastest sprint I had ever seen in my life. He was barefooted and the moon was full, shimmering full of light. With every lengthening stride Ambrose took there were little spurts of dirt flung out behind him like white talcum powder by his curling toes.

His example gave me strength. Bravely waiting my fate, I laid down on the floor of our little tree house, and cried myself to sleep.

There is a happy ending to my little tale. Nobody ever heard that awful scream again for as long as Ambrose lived there. Quite wisely, I never told anyone what a brave hero our dear Ambrose was; they might have misunderstood his death defying leap out of that tree as he struggled valiantly to lead that awful lion away from me.

Cougars and mountain lions, whatever name they go by, will eat virtually anything you can get a house cat to eat if you cut it up for him. Mountain lions have extraordinary vision and are remarkably fast. When deer bunch together in the winter, cougars find and eat more deer. In the good old summertime, when deer tend to scatter more widely, the cougar adds rabbits, birds, porcupines, squirrels, raccoons, rats, and even grasshoppers to the menu.

Under good circumstances a cougar can kill an elk or moose seven times as large as itself.

People rarely get more than a brief glimpse of a Mountain Lion in the wild as these cats prefer solitude. They are, however, highly unpredictable and have been known to seek out and attack people. In most cases, this occurs when they are extremely hungry or humans have invaded their hunting areas. One got after me in a cave I was exploring but stopped chasing me just as soon as I left the mouth of the cave behind. Many of my traveling companions insist though that I have an extremely agile guardian angel protecting me. Don't count on your lion stopping before you are exhausted.

The desert mountain lion I am most familiar with has a tan-colored coat, much like the African lion. In other areas the animals range in color from reddish to brownish yellow or gray. Black stripes reach from the mouth to the eyes, and the tail tip is black. The head is small and round with a black spot over the eyes. The most recognizable feature of the cougar is its long and heavy tail, which measures almost two-thirds the length of the head and body.

The predatory behavior of a Mountain Lion is very similar to the domestic cat. The lion will attempt to conceal itself for a surprise attack while stalking its prey. A crouched position is assumed with the tail twitching and the ears upright. An agitated lion may snarl and lay its ears back. Watching them, you can almost believe your domestic cat just grew a bit larger. This is one of the reasons people have attempted to make pets of these cats. In spite of their cuteness, these cats are wild and they ordinarily do not fare well as pets.

Generally, cougars are ready to snarl a warning to anything wanting to invade its solitary existence. If tracks show two or more cougars traveling together, it probably indicates a female with kittens.

If you go tracking a mountain lion remember they have four toes with three distinct lobes present at the base of the pad. Its claws are retractable, so the claws usually do not leave imprints and are thus easily distinguished from that of large dogs.

Those sharp retractable claws can dig into the thickest deer or elk skin. Long canine teeth hook into a deer's tough hide, helping the cougar hold onto its prey. A single jerk of the cat's mighty forelimbs can snap an elk's neck. It prefers smaller prey that it can bite the neck of and throw around its neck and haul off. One rancher claims that a cougar cleared a 9-foot fence with a grown sheep in its mouth.

Adult males may be more than 8 feet long from nose to end of tail and generally weigh between 130 and 150 pounds. Adult females can be 7 feet long and weigh between 65 and 90 pounds. Females usually breed at 2.5 years and commonly have 2 or 3 kittens. Preferring a cave or rock den for its nest, the female gives birth to two or three spotted kittens.

At birth, the kittens are blind, weigh a pound or less, and stretch 12 inches long. Their eyes open at two weeks. At six weeks they may go on the first kill, as observers. And at six months, their spots begin to disappear. The cubs generally stay with the mother until they are 20-22 months old, picking up tricks of the trade on how to stalk rabbits and deer, practicing their moves and timing.

The mother raises her young alone and trains them how to hunt. The kittens stay with her from 18 to 24 months, and then disperse to find their own home areas. Their usual life span appears to be about 12 years old, but they have been known to live up to 19 years in pleasant captivity.

Because it is a hunting animal the size and color of the cat varies greatly depending on what kind of place it calls home. That could be anywhere from the south west of Canada down the western states of North America and throughout most western parts of the South American continent. In the north of its range and in higher mountainous regions the puma's coat is longer, providing extra protection against the extremes in temperature - the color of the fur varies from slate gray, through yellow buff to light reddish brown. The puma has a small, broad head with small rounded ears, a powerful body with long hind legs and tail, which is tipped with black. If your presence is stressing the animal its ears will wrinkle back and its mouth will open.

Exposing those teeth is supposed to give you second thoughts about the wisdom of approaching any closer. With me in the picture it works every time. Your imagination may also suggest that the eyes widen just before it attacks.

The puma can be found in areas as varied as mountains, deserts, and jungles, but, because of persecution by humans, it is now generally restricted to wilderness areas. Nonetheless, there have been killings right in town by cougars. When my grand daughter (Emily the cat chomper) was [attacked by a large female lion](#) I noticed that the front paws are not employed in the same direction at the same time. When the right paw is coming down the left paw is going up.

The attack is carried out in a flurry of motion with claws fully extended. The lion quickly winded itself with this furious activity and Emily leaned forward and encouraged the lion to engage in yet another attack. "Kitty, kitty, kitty," she called hopefully. "Pretty kitty, come on."

Emily must get her courage from the other side of the family. My own behavior in a similar circumstance was quite different. It happened on this wise, but remember as you read along that I had by this time encountered about a dozen other cougars and mountain lions in between my first one and this one. I was taking my family through the Phoenix Zoo. Since the zoo at this time was building NATURAL habitat cages so there appeared to be little or no barrier between you and the animals my children and wife were really excited to be there, especially with their father's extensive knowledge of wild animals being displayed at every opportunity. In short, I was jumping up and down in an habitual eagerness to show off.

Wolves have always been one of my favorite species and thus we paused for almost twenty minutes as I expounded their cause and their future. My audience expanded until even the zoo keepers began to listen attentively. One and all had been astounded by the depth of my knowledge and – having done my all – I began edging out of the crowd so that the real heroes – the wolves down in their open pen – could be viewed more closely.

I watched that crowd of over twenty people that I had gathered around me press forward to relentlessly chatter on about the prowess of those lithe young killing machines milling uncertainly at their very feet. My heart was about to burst with well-deserved gratitude so I did an about face, executed to military perfection, I might add so that in just one split second I turned from looking at the wolves and was suddenly eye to eye and nose to nose with the biggest mountain lion in the state of Arizona, bar none!

The encounter lasted only for a split second. I know it did because I don't remember even one step in the flashing sequence that led me to suddenly realizing that I had somehow sailed, without touching it I might add, right over the barrier that protected them and was descending with little or no grace right into the pen with the wolves. They were so astonished by my sudden visit that their mouths dropped open in astonishment as they awaited my arrival.

Fortunately they had just been fed. Despite their fearsome reputation of murderous disposition they scattered at my approach. My relief lasted only for a small moment though. Then my wife shrieked: "What in the world are you doing down there?"

My own reputation for snapping out quick-witted responses was shattered that day. I did not in fact, utter a single word of explanation until the brave zoo keepers had lowered a rope for my rescue. Only after my feet had left the ground did the wolves realize they were losing the choicest part of their cuisine. But so fast did I clamber up that rope that I was safely well over on the side of the angels before the first set of fangs clicked shut where I had just been.

Muttering my thanks to the saviors of my soul I edged quickly away from them and forced myself closer to the mountain lion. Concerns for my safety prevented me from getting any closer than three feet from the lion's nose a second time. Because of my recent encounter with the lion, the plate glass window that stood between us appeared to be quite inadequate even after I noticed it for the first time. I had to visit the zoo two more times before I could force myself to place my nose against that pane of glass at the same time the lion did. Even then I questioned the purity of my courage for many years. So did my wife and children.

Since I could not excuse my part of the adventure to myself I never attempted to explain the matter to them. Sometimes the only course open to a man is to clasp his chin against his breast and keep his mouth firmly shut.

The mountain lion is found over a wider range than any other mammal in the western hemisphere, except for man. Once common, the puma has become extinct in many areas, and its survival is now said to be threatened. The Eastern puma of North America and the Florida cougar of the Southern United States suffer to the point they are considered endangered.

The puma can be found in a variety of habitats. They find the lofty solitude of mountain forest embracing, all the way up to around 16,000 feet. Nor do they experience any shortness of breath in a lowland swamp or grasslands. In rolling mountainous regions, where the cat follows its migrating prey as summer gives way to winter, the male puma can often patrol circulating areas that add up in excess of 100 square miles, well covered. It is common for the puma to mark the boundaries of its territory with tree scrapes and sprays of urine, which serve as markers and warnings to other puma.

Sometimes the males' loops will overlap the territories of several females who tend to maintain smaller ranges so their commute to home is shorter. The grown male cougar won't bother the female intruder unless it is mating season. After mating, the male moves on alone once again, leaving the female to deal with the aftermath of a broken love affair.

Blending in against most any background cougars have the talent to hunt successfully by day or night. Since it is not a wanton killer the cat will save its food in dense undergrowth, returning to it several times over a period of several days. The meat can get pretty rank before the cat decides to try for a fresh kill.

If the lion ever discovers the location of another lion's kill it resolves to act out a rage for revenge and consume every bit of it. I came upon one lion still at another lion's dinner table, a big steel trap on its hind foot.

Evidently this is a good way to trap lions, which should be a lesson against revenge for all of us to follow. Even though I remained on the site for many long minutes my feeble mind never dredged up a single plan for removing the lion from its predicament without putting myself in a worse one. This was on one of my many jaunts out into the desert when I took nothing with me save that which was inadvertently in my pockets at the precise moment I made the split second decision to go.

Comparable in size to the leopard, the puma is big enough to kill domestic cattle and horses. This makes it an enemy of livestock farmers who offer bounty for the cat's scalp. The rest of their diet can be filled with wild deer, sheep, rodents, rabbits and beaver. In hunting its prey the puma uses the strength of its powerful hind legs to lunge at its prey with a single leap or running jumps that can reach in excess of 40 feet. Being a cat they often perch on a low-hanging limb or ledge and wait unseen for unsuspecting hot pockets to show up. One dairy farmer friend of mine came out to the milk barn at three in the morning and was milking away even though the cattle were unusually hard to manage.

In exasperation he looked towards heaven for relief and his pleading gaze fixed inadvertently upon the hungry gaze of a large lion perched amid the rafters. LeRoy slipped from the barn and hurried home for his .22 rifle. Alas and alack, by the time he returned, his target had disappeared. When I told him he was probably lucky the cat had left LeRoy did not believe it for one second. "I was a crack shot sniper at the Battle of the Bulge." Maybe so but I've seen one man still standing that had four .22 bullet holes in his body and three .22 bullet holes in his head. He was cussing up a storm what he was going to do when he caught that perp. Mountain lions are harder to kill than a man.

Mountain lions are most active at dusk and dawn. However, they will roam and hunt at any time of the day or night and in all seasons, depending on food availability. They will also feed on wild sheep, elk, rabbits, grouse, and occasionally small livestock like sheep, chickens and geese. It is known that a cougar is able to kill a 600-pound moose but it prefers deer meat to most anything else.

It climbs well, is an excellent jumper, and like I said, often drops from limbs onto its prey. Its powerful back legs and long front limbs allow it to jump into tree limbs swinging 18 feet or more higher than their heads.

Let me reiterate: This is not a good household pet for the beginning cat admirer to cut his teeth on.

Now that you are more familiar with the cat family we are ready to swoop forward and discover some of the big boys everybody dreams about killing outright or making into a house pet. We'll start with the pride of the pack, the leopard.

A beautiful combination of grace and power, the leopard is compact muscle and flowing movement, all tucked up inside one body. The leopard is most easily recognized by its rosette patterned coat and extremely long, darker tail. This large cat is sometimes confused with the South American Jaguar. The leopard is less stocky though, and unlike the jaguar, its rosette markings are generally smaller and have no internal spots. Adult leopards measure about two feet tall at the shoulder and as much as seven feet long, weighing 80-200 pounds for males and 60-130 pounds for females.

The overall size of the leopard depends very much on the subspecies and location, with the largest animals growing to a length of nearly 5 feet with an additional tail length of some 3 feet. The base coloration of the coat also varies greatly depending upon location, ranging from golden/yellow in open grasslands, through yellow/cream in desert areas to deep gold in mountain and forest regions. How such a creature sneaks unseen and unheard across an area covered only by sparse vegetation is a mystery.



Leopard

Cat of Mystery

Because of its skill and camouflage the leopard can creep extremely close to its prey, revealing itself for only a few seconds at the instant of attack. With its stealth and patience, the leopard can suddenly materialize right alongside its prey. After a kill, the leopard sets off towards a nearby tree with the carcass in tow. In many instances it must act fast to get its booty out of the reach of other hungry carnivores and scavengers. Its powerful limb and neck muscles let the leopard carry a fully-grown male antelope or even young giraffe, twenty to thirty feet high into the treetops. Like I said, pound per pound the cat is nine times stronger than a man. **Quite often the game carried so easily into the trees weighs up to three times the leopard's own body weight.**

Basically there are three kinds of leopards and we will focus on each of them in turn... Let's start with The Leopard

The leopard or panther is a large, graceful cat with a long, lithe build. Its coat is pale brown to yellowish-brown with dark brown spots in rosettes. Some individuals are very dark brown, almost black, effectively masking their spots and producing the famous black panther.

The leopard has somewhat of a sinister reputation, which has been accentuated by the fact that more leopards are melanistic than occurs in other species. If you will remember, melanism produces a black fur, in which the leopards usual light background coloring appears to have been dyed black, leaving the even darker spots to show through only in certain light.

This condition has produced the name "black panther". Some people believe that black panthers are more powerful and savage than ordinary leopards, but no extra strength comes with the dark color.

A solid-colored leopard or "black panther" is often of a more aggressive nature than those with a spotted coat. This is because normal spotted mothers tend to dislike solid-color cubs, often driving them away prematurely. This ostracism produces mean-tempered, intolerant individuals, just as it does with humans. No satisfactory explanation has ever been given for this phenomenon. It has been observed that most of these darker cubs are born in the wetter areas of Africa, where they are more likely to blend in with the environment.

In the hours of the night the leopard seems to truly find its element. He moves in silence, walking with each forepaw turned inward. The outer edge of the paw strikes the ground first, and objects likely to cause noise can be avoided before the leopard's full weight comes down. Because of this hunting technique, silent and solitary, the opportunistic leopard is able to live off a much broader spectrum of prey than the lion or cheetah can.

The leopard is generally found in all parts of [Africa](#) south of the Sahara. Then, in Asia the leopard is found east of the Indus and south of Mongolia, and also throughout the island of Indonesia.

Being a truly versatile hunter the leopard can stalk its prey by night, by twilight, and even in broad daylight in late afternoon and early morning. Furthermore, the leopard can stalk game equally well from the ground or from trees. Trees? Yes. Natives say the leopard is often glimpsed dropping silently on its prey.

The leopard's diet is dependent largely upon its habitat. If it's out there the leopard can usually bring it down to the dinner table. The leopard's hunting prowess gives it a wide selection of large or small game of almost any type, In the open grasslands of Africa where roaming herds of large to medium sized herbivores are common the leopard will hunt for young eland and wildebeest as well as the fleet footed impala and gazelle.

The democratic leopard will also stoop to bringing down small mammals such as hares and rock hyrax, reptiles and insects. Over in the west and central forested regions of Africa the leopard's prey consists mainly of the smaller antelope such as duiker, small monkeys and various rodents such as rats, squirrels and even porcupines.

The male leopard may share shop around with its mate during their breeding season. One of them will drive the prey forward while the other lies in wait to make the kill. The female leopard prefers the solitary, nocturnal life in its pursuit of prey, but as the cubs get to growing the leopard will rediscover the joys of hunting during daylight hours.

The leopard population is kept down by direct competition from the other large cats such as the lion in Africa and tiger in tropical Asia although this is largely overcome by the leopard's ability to hunt on a wider prey base than either of its two larger rivals. Needing less water gives the leopard in Asia still more advantage over the tiger. In some areas where its habitat is close to that of humans the leopard has been known to hunt close to houses, preying on anything out there loose; domestic animals, livestock and rodents.

Hunting Habits of the Snow Leopard

The snow leopard has learned to survive in harsh conditions that shut its other rivals out. Its main diet there consists of wild sheep goats, including Markhor and Ibex. Other items on the menu includes Musk Deer, marmots, various species of rabbits and birds. Using the natural protection of the terrain to stalk its prey, the snow leopard keeps below the skyline and pounces on its victim. The snow leopard has massive power in its rear legs which can propel the cat to jump over 40ft along the ground and this is often used to great effect in the final phase of hunting

When a larger animal has been brought down the snow leopard will remain close to its kill and return over a period of three to four days to feed. This well built, muscular cat can bring down prey more than two to three times its size, as is the case with the native Yak. However, the snow leopard is generally not aggressive toward man, unlike its distant neighbors the Tiger and Leopard.

However, where human habitation does come close to the range of the snow leopard, it is common, during the harsh winter months for the cat to take a bite out of the domestic livestock supply.

Due to the often-harsh weather conditions that prevail, Snow Leopard cubs are always born in the spring, with mating taking place some three months earlier in late winter. This practice ensures that an abundant food source is available and less effort is needed to secure a kill. There can be up to four cubs in one litter but the usual number is just two. The leopard has a gestation period of approximately 98 days. The cubs stay with their mothers until they are over 18 months old.

The Clouded Leopard

The clouded leopard is immediately recognizable by its distinctive coat. The base color of the fur is pale yellow/brown and is marked on the body by large irregular shaped markings, each dark brown/black around the edge and lighter in the middle and it is this 'cloud' pattern that gives the cat its name.

The undersides and short, stout legs are usually spotted and the head and neck streaked with black/dark brown. In overall size the clouded leopard is similar to that of a small leopard, reaching up to 38 inches in body length, whilst having an extremely long tail, measuring up to nearly 3 feet on the largest of the species. The clouded leopard also has the largest canine teeth in proportion to its body size of any of the cat family.

Native to South Eastern Asia, the habitat of the clouded leopard is generally that of dense tropical forest up to a height of 7,000 feet, however recent reports indicate that the cat may also inhabit more open forested terrain and even swamp margins.

A distinct sub-species known as the Formosan clouded leopard is reported to be found only on Taiwan - however lack of recent sightings suggest that the loss of natural habitat and decline of its prey base may indicate that this sub-species may now be extinct in the wild.

The Clouded Leopard is an extremely good climber, aided by the balancing effect of its long tail and supple ankle joints. In captivity the clouded leopard has been observed hanging from overhanging branches by its rear legs. The clouded leopard still prefers to hunt mainly on the ground, and at night. Its prey includes deer, goats, wild pig, reptiles, and birds. Monkeys are also on the dinner list and it may be that even these are hunted from the ground.

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Jaguarundi

The Unusual Cat

The jaguarundi is one of the most unusual of the wildcats. The jaguarundi is native to Central America and the northern and central countries of South America down to Argentina - it is also sometimes sighted in the lower parts of Texas and New Mexico. A small group was introduced into Florida and some descendants have been found in this area.

In appearance the jaguarundi is unlike any other cat and has been likened to a large weasel or otter, hence its English common name of 'Otter Cat'. It is uniform in color, ranging from dark gray/brown to an almost chestnut brown. In common with other species of wildcat, the darker forms are usually associated with dense forest cover and the paler forms with more arid habitats.

The body of the jaguarundi is long and low supported by short legs, measuring up to some 30 inches in length with an additional tail of about 20 inches. The head is small in proportion to its body size and sports short weasel like ears and narrow brown eyes. The jaguarundi is spotted at birth but these spots are lost at around three or four months old. There is some evidence to suggest that the jaguarundi is perhaps a descendant of the puma.

The jaguarundi is most commonly found in lowland habitats that afford it good cover, such as forest margins and scrubland but is also found at times in dense tropical vegetation. The jaguarundi is often to be found close to running water and it is an expert catcher of fish, which it catches with its probing front paws. Reports on the other prey species associated with the cat tend to vary on a regional basis but in general they include birds, which form a large part of its diet, small mammals, rodents, and reptiles.

The Jaguar Legendary Cat

All of the big cats have inspired their share of myths and legends, but few have played such a pivotal role in the religion and culture of a continent as the jaguar. The jaguar is the largest cat in the Western hemisphere, but it was more than its size that impressed the Indians. For the Indians, the jaguar embodied immeasurable power. Its name, translated, means, "a beast that kills its prey with one bound". The jaguar's strength is truly legendary, although its size is nowhere near what it appears to be.

The jaguar masters all dimensions - it climbs, it swims, and it roams the dense forest with ease. For the largest predator in the Americas, almost no prey is too ambitious a target. Although some adult tapirs weigh 650 pounds and thus may escape the jaguar's attack, nearly everything else is vulnerable to its awesome strength.

The jaguar's robust power has given it the reputation of being immense. In reality, jaguars are smaller than the legend or looks would have people believe. The jaguar is a strong, stocky cat, deep chested with a large, rounded head and short sturdy limbs.

Even the jaguar's canine teeth seem stronger than those of the other great cats. Lions, tigers, and leopards usually kill their prey with a throat or neck bite. Jaguars, on the other hand, often bite through the temporal bones of the skull, between the ears of the prey. Jaguars can kill smaller animals, such as dogs, just by slapping them with a paw. Animals killed in this fashion usually have no signs of external injury; they usually die of a crushed skull.

According to one Indian myth, the jaguar acquired its beautiful spotted coat by daubing mud on its body with its paws. On close inspection, the markings do resemble paw prints.

Jaguars-Variations Abound

In appearance the Jaguar is often confused with the Leopard - both cats have a similar brownish/yellow base fur color, which is distinctively marked with dark rosette markings. However, the jaguar can be distinguished by the presence of small dots or irregular shapes within the larger rosette markings. It has a more stocky and muscular body and a shorter tail than the leopard.

Black jaguars are common in certain areas and are often confusingly labeled 'Black Panthers', a name that is also applied to black Leopards.

The overall body size and coloration of the cat often relates to its location - jaguars found in dense forested areas of the Amazon Basin are often only half the size of those found in more open. Coloration of dense forest dwelling jaguars is often darker than those found in grassland and scrub forest - here, as with the darker coloration of rainforest leopards, the darker coats give better camouflage in the low light condition on the forest floor and offers the dark coated cat greater success in hunting and a greater chance of survival.

In comparison with the other cats of its size the jaguar has particularly powerful jaws and often kills its prey by piercing the skull with one swift bite. In the Cockscomb Basin Reserve in Belize the predominant prey species has been found to be Armadillo, whose bony protective plates offer little defense against the power of the jaguars bite.

Where possible, the cat will inhabit areas close to water - it is an expert in catching fish and will often tackle turtles and large caiman, dragging them from the water to hide the carcass in the dense undergrowth. Equally at home as a climber, although not as adept as the leopard, the jaguar will hunt monkeys in the lower branches of the large rain forest trees.

The Beautiful Ocelot

The fur of the ocelot has dark brown irregular shaped spots and stripes, edged with black on a yellow/tawny background. This gives the ocelot a distinctive appearance that is sought after by many enthusiasts. It is grouped, along with the Margay into the sub-genus Leopardus. The cats underlying coloration varies with its habitat, with the base color of its fur being a rich yellow/cream in more arid areas to a darker yellow/brown in forested habitats. The slender body of the ocelot can measure up to four foot in length and it weighs in at twenty to thirty pounds.

The ocelot's hunting technique is varied and is carried out mostly by night - its prey includes small deer, rabbits, rodents, reptiles and when available, fish. The ocelot swims well and, although not as adept in climbing as the Margay, will hunt for birds and sometimes sleeps in the lower branches of trees in its forest habitat. Male and female cats often share territories, which can be up to three square miles in area.

As far back as the ancient Aztec civilization, the ocelot has been hunted and prized for its fur and today, along with deforestation in much of its habitat, has led to the cat's virtual extinction. Once found in many areas of southern North America, Central America and much of South America, today the animal has almost disappeared from its range in the southern states of North America. One particular sub-species, pardalis.albescens is threatened by the conversion of large areas of plain into farmland - it is reported that as few as 120 ocelot survive in [Texas](#) today. In Central America and the northern countries of South America the ocelot is still to be found in forested areas but is at risk through hunting for its fur.

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The Cheetah

In both looks and physical mobility the cheetah resembles a large muscular greyhound. Cheetahs have smaller teeth and larger nasal passages than any other big cats, which may be an adaptation that allows them to take in more air during the recovery period after a sprint. The cheetah has neither power nor weight.

- His teeth aren't as strong as many other breeds of large cat.
- He doesn't have the advantage of hunting with a pack.
- The cheetah possesses one quality, however, that no other cat can match:

SPEED.

The secret to its speed seems to be the cheetah's supple spine, which coils and uncoils like a spring, catapulting the cat forward. As soon as it has crept close enough to its prey, the cheetah springs out of concealment. Sucking in huge amounts of air, it arches its back and pulls its feet together. Then the spring-like backbone uncurls and the legs shoot out to their fullest extension. As the front legs hit the ground, the spine curls up again, ready to propel the legs out for another push.

In the cheetah, the hind limbs push sequentially rather than simultaneously, as happens in slower animals. Thus for about half the time, a running cheetah has all four feet off the ground at the same time - literally, almost flying. All the while, the long tail streams out behind, a rudder to help the cheetah turn. This makes the cheetah the fastest land animal over short distances - up to 70 mph.

This dazzling speed provides a tremendous advantage in pursuing prey out in the open. Since it lacks the long canine teeth that allow other cats to easily bring down large prey the cheetah needs its speed. Unlike most other cats, the cheetah can not retract its claws. That means that when it zips along with incredible speed, the claws are touching the ground, and thus they are constantly being dulled, just like those of a dog.

Even the pads resemble a dog's: small and tough, with edges that aid in gripping the ground. The pads improve traction for the cheetah, adding to its ability to follow the twists and turns of its prey.

The cheetah, unlike other big cats, does not roar but it does purr, give high-pitched yelps and bark. The cheetah also makes a chirring noise like other large cats. The cheetah's hunting technique has been adapted to suit its speed and agility and unlike many other wild cats it hunts mainly by day. The cheetah will follow its prey from a distance, commonly the large herds of gazelle, impala or antelope, selecting old, injured or young animals, whose speed will be impaired. Once selected the cheetah will wait for the right moment to give chase and -- with its superior speed -- more often than not succeed in bringing down its prey on the first attempt.

The cheetah will hunt both alone and in family groups, usually made up of adult male relatives - such groups usually have much larger territories than the lone female hunter who must stay close to her young. Cheetah cubs, born between 2 and 4 to the litter, have a poor survival rate, commonly falling prey to lions or a pack of hyenas. After approximately 18 months of following and learning from their mother, the young cheetah is ready to fend for itself.

Ten Cheetah Facts Funstrips

*While running, cheetahs cover 20 to 22 feet in one stride, about the same distance as a racehorse. But cheetahs are so much faster-the fastest racehorse runs 43 miles per hour while cheetahs can run at speeds of up to 70 miles per hour.

*Cheetahs eat the meat (not usually the skin or bones) of antelope, birds, rabbits, porcupines and ostriches.

*Cheetahs don't need to drink water, as they get the moisture they need from the bodies of their prey.

*Cheetahs are the only cats that, while sprinting, can turn right around in midair to follow their prey.

*Cheetah cubs have a long mane on their neck and shoulders that disappears as they get older.

*Cheetahs are quite vocal, making a unique, bird-like sound called a "chirrup" when they're excited. Mothers use the same sound to call their cubs. They also purr, growl, snarl, hiss, cough, moan, and bleat, but cheetahs cannot roar like lions or tigers do. Researchers have learned that, during the mating season, cheetahs make a unique sound called a "stutter bark."

*Cheetahs are solitary and peaceable except at breeding time, when males fight over females and have been known to kill each other. Grown Cheetahs hunt alone and don't have any of the group behaviors that lions do.

*Cubs live with their mothers for about 18 months. Littermates will stay together for about six to eight more months, sharing a territory. Then the females head off to live on their own, while the males stay together in small groups until they are mature.

*There are only around 12,000 cheetahs left, their numbers down from as many as 100,000 just 100 years ago.



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A Dozen Little Known Facts



About Lions

*Scientists know more about African lions
Panthera leo
than they know about any other cat.

*Lions are the only cats that prefer to live in large groups, called "prides." A pride is a group consisting of 3 to 30 lions. The pride consists of lionesses (mothers, sisters, and cousins), and their cubs, along with a few unrelated adult males.

In prides, the unrelated males only stay a few months or a few years, but the older lionesses stay together for life.

*Lion cubs can nurse from any adult lioness in the pride, not just their own moms.

*Lion researchers have noticed that some activities are "contagious" in prides. One lion will yawn, or groom itself, or roar, setting off a wave of yawning, grooming, or roaring!

*In Kenya, the Swahili word for lion, simba, also means "king," "strong," and "aggressive."

*A lion's life is filled with sleeping, napping, and resting. Over the course of 24 hours, lions have short bursts of intense activity, followed by long bouts of lying around that total up to 21 hours!

*Lions live in a matriarchal society.

*Males guard the cubs while the lionesses are hunting, and they make sure the cubs get enough food.

*Lions hunt antelope and hoofed animals, baby elephants or rhinos, rodents, reptiles, insects and even crocodiles. They will also scavenge or steal prey from leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, or wild dogs, even eating prey that is spoiled.

*A lion – while chasing down prey -- can run the length of a football field in six seconds.

*Asian lions *Panthera leo persica* used to be found from the Middle East across to India. Now they are only found in the Gir Forest in India. There are only about 200 to 260 of these endangered lions left in the wild. They live in a reserve that used to be royal hunting grounds, in an area of dry teak forest.

There are also about 200 Asian lions living in zoos.

Lions Are Social Cats

The lion is unusual amongst the cat species in that it prefers to live in organized social groups called a pride. The pride can consist of as many as thirty to forty lions the majority of which are females -- and their offspring along -- with a small number of resident males.

It is common for the females within the pride to be closely related and this family bonding is often extended through communal suckling and caring of the young within the group. The territory of the pride is fixed and varies in size depending on the availability and distribution of prey. In larger territories, which can be as much as 200 square miles, prides are often split into smaller social groupings.

Hunting is also a shared process. Lionesses hunt by ambush, with the majority of the hunting group chasing the prey toward individuals lying in wait who are then able to give chase over short distances before leaping on the selected animal for the kill.

The lion's prey consists mainly of medium to large herd animals such as antelope, gazelle and wildebeest. Once the prey is taken it is common for the males of the pride to eat first even though they take no part in the hunting process. The females are next to feed, followed by the cubs. **When food is scarce, cubs often starve because the food is gone by the time they get a turn.**

Incoming males threaten the young cubs of the pride.

When a male lion reaches maturity it leaves its natural pride and goes in search of another pride for which it must fight for the right to join. Older or injured males are ousted by the young incoming male, who then takes up residence in the pride, often killing the cubs of the beaten male, thus ensuring that its own, future offspring, will have a greater chance of survival.

Queen of Beasts

The lion is considered the "King of the Beasts". The correct title should be "Queen of the Beasts" for females are the ones that kill more often, catching more than three-fourths of the pride's prey. In the matriarchal society of the lion, the lioness is the true leader, although the male looks more imposing.

While both males and females roar, only the male boasts the large golden and/or black ruff around its face. The mane seems to intimidate rivals and protects the neck during fights. Even though its appearance gives regal vibrations, the lion is far from the creature of popular renown. Rather than being a proud predator, the lion is often a downright sneaky little scavenger. A substantial amount of the lion's food is robbed from other killers - often from hyenas.

At its heart, a lion pride is a closed sisterhood of female adults, usually related to each other. Lionesses reveal an exceptional capacity for cooperation. They hunt together with some degree of coordinated tactics, which enables them to be more successful than if operating as individuals. Lion cubs are brought up in something approaching communal style. Even though a lioness gives preference to her own cubs when they want to nurse, she will allow those of other pride members to join in too. In contrast to this cooperation, the males of the pride contribute to the pride's stability by keeping transient males out.

Lion cubs are protected by the pride as well. Cubs are weaned at six or seven months, and their permanent teeth emerge between the ninth and twelfth months. The cubs depend on their mother and the pride for about two years. Then the young males must search for their own pride and home range. The females usually remain with the pride in which they were born.

When we think of the big cats, the lion is often the first image to pop into our minds. That roaring lion we see in some of the best old movies reinforces that idea. The lion's distinctive appearance attracts us instantly. Unfortunately, fewer and fewer of these beautiful cats roam the world each year.

In appearance the lion is a powerfully built, muscular cat. The fur is short and generally uniform in color, ranging from gray/buff to reddish brown in coloration with the exception of the undersides, which are often white, especially in females. The back of the ears and tip of the tail are dark brown or black.

The most distinctive feature of the male lion is its mane, a ruff of thick, long fur. The color of the mane varies from a light brown to almost black and covers the sides of the face, neck and in some animals extends to the abdomen. The adolescent male begins to grow its mane at about 18 months and the mane continues to grow until the cat reaches about five years of age - throughout this period it is common for the mane to grow darker with age. A fully developed male lion can grow up to be 10 feet in body length and is surpassed in size only by the larger species of tigers.

The lion is to be found in parts of eastern and southern Africa and is commonly protected in preserves, although hunting lions is still common. The Asiatic Lion once found throughout India, the Middle East and Southern Asia, is today, only to be found in the Gir Forest National Park in Gujarat, western India, where the population is estimated to be in the region of 290. The male of the Asian species has a less prominent mane compared to that of the African male and both sexes display a long fold of skin that runs the length of the belly, which is not found on the African species.



The Tiger

Now we are ready to explore the world of tigers, the biggest cat of them all. The male Siberian or Amur Tiger sports a total body length in excess of 10 ft and weighs up to 1,300 pounds, making it by far the largest and most powerful member of the cat family. Overall body size varies considerably throughout the five sub-species of tigers - the female Sumatran growing to a mere seven feet in length. With the exception of the Lion, the tiger is probably the most easily recognized of all wild cats - its fur ranges from orange to brownish yellow with a white chest and belly is covered with broken vertical black/dark brown stripes. The length of the fur is longer in the Amur tiger, which inhabits the colder forested regions of eastern Russia and northern China.

Tigers are never found far from a source of water. They are strong swimmers and have a particular love of bathing in pools and lakes in hotter regions. Tigers are nocturnal hunters. Although its habitat dictates the type of animal that it hunts, the tiger prefers to bring down larger prey, such as wild boar, buffalo and deer, but also hunts fish, monkeys and various small mammals if its preferred food source is unavailable.

The tiger is often regarded as a cautious hunter, stalking as close as possible to the rear of its prey before making the final charge. The tiger will cache its food supply, hiding it under loose vegetation, returning to feed on the carcass over several days. Although, with the exception of mother and cubs learning to hunt, it is generally a solitary hunter the tiger will often share its food with others of its family group.

The tiger was once found throughout most of southern, eastern and central Asia along with small pockets in the Middle East. Today at least three of the subspecies of tiger -Caspian in the Middle East and west central Asia - Balinese and Javan from the islands of Bali and Java are now extinct. Of the remaining five subspecies the most numerous is the Bengal or Indian with a population of between 3,500 and 4,000. The Indian government has played a big part in the conservation of the Bengal - in the early 1970's they established Project Tiger and opened a number of reserves in which to protect the animal. However poaching of the animal for its furs and other body parts is still a major threat.

Although in many ways a solitary animal, patrolling and marking its territory with urine sprays and scrapes it is now known that the male tiger will often spend time with its mate and offspring. The male's territory usually encompasses that of more than one female but is rigorously protected against intrusion from other neighboring males.

Until recently, little has been known of the life style of the tiger. Just as we are beginning to learn a bit more about the largest of the big cats, we may be in danger of seeing them become extinct. Several sub-species have already disappeared and others are close to that status.

Color Variations in Tigers

There has been documentation of even more tiger variation colors, Below are listed several of these.

The golden tiger (golden tabby tiger, strawberry tiger) is even more rare than the white color morph. There are records of golden Bengal tigers in India dating back to the early 1900s (as "stripeless" tigers). Black color is due to the non-agouti mutation. Agouti refers to the ticking of each individual hair on the background color of a tabby cat. In certain light, the pattern still shows up because the background color is less dense than the color of the markings. There are unconfirmed reports of pure black non-striped tigers (true melanistic tigers).

Blue tigers have been recorded. They have slate gray or black stripes on a pale gray body. Normally blue dilution makes the color lighter e.g. black becomes blue-gray; it does not transform orange into gray. Blue tigers have been sporadically reported in the mountains of the Fujian province in China. It is described as maltese (bluish-gray or slate-blue) with white patches on the face and black stripes.

Other normally tawny cats have blue or gray color forms e.g. the bobcat so it would not be impossible to have blue/gray mutations in the tiger.

Brown and red tigers and other anomalies have also been reported. A stripeless tiger was reported in eastern India's Sunderbans and was supposedly a local strain of Bengal tiger. In 1929, Reginald Pocock documented a brown tiger whose stripes were only a little darker than its coat's background color i.e. dark orange-brown markings on a normal orange base color; others are brown with black stripes.

There have been unconfirmed reports from the Sunderbans of Reverse Striped Tigers whose coats have an abnormally dark background color patterned with orange stripes. This is the reverse of the normal black-on-orange coloration. During 1996, yellow-striped black tigers were reported near Baladaghar and between Patabil and Devasthali.

The Chinese tiger, outlawed by the communist government of the 1960's as a threat to the 'peoples' food source and the Siberian, suffering from the destruction and loss of its natural habitat, have slumped to near extinction.

Without intervention it is probable that these two subspecies will disappear forever from their natural habitat.

White Tigers

White tigers are a novelty that draws hundreds of thousands to zoos to see them. These tigers are the same as Bengal tigers, they just mutated somewhere along the line. There is some question as to whether or not space and money should be spent on these beautiful cats. If the argument against doing so wins, we may lose yet another beautiful animal.

The white tiger is NOT a true albino. There is simply less dark colored pigment in its coat - a condition that is sometimes known as a 'chinchilla' mutation. The white tiger is not pure white but has dark brown stripes and bright, ice-blue eyes. There is some concern about the keeping of white tigers in zoos. These cats are by nature, extremely inbred and possibly not of purebred Indian descent. Some critics suggest that they are taking up valuable cage space and breeding resources and this is to the detriment of other pure bred and more threatened sub species.

Although popular in some zoos, white tigers are extremely rare in the wild - the last sighting of a white tiger in its natural habitat was near Rewa in Central India back in 1951. This male tiger was captured by the Maharaja of Rewa and named Mohan - it is this animal that most of the white tigers in captivity today are related

This inbreeding is what is causing all the controversy. Non-supporters feel money would be better spent on trying to save those tigers that are of purer breeding. Those who support the white tiger argue that the rarity alone of these cats should merit trying to keep them from extinction. Whatever the final outcome, the white tiger is one of the most beautiful of the large cats. In addition, the inbreeding has produced a gentler version of this cat.

Living To Eat

The tiger starts its day rising from rest in the afternoon and beginning its search for prey. If it spots prey, it begins to stalk, crouched low, eyes intent, until it has moved into its position for attack. With one mighty bound, the tiger grabs the prey with its forepaws and drags its victim to the ground, then seizes its throat in a strangling grip. Once it has killed, the tiger drags the carcass to a secluded place where it will feed during the night. Usually it remains close to the kill, defending its prize from vultures, hyenas, and other scavengers. Depending on the size of the kill, it may last the cat for several days. If the tiger leaves the kill, it covers it with leaves and branches.

While deer and pig are favored prey, providing ample food for several days, the tiger will also eat many small animals, including monkeys, porcupines, rodents, reptiles, fish - in fact, almost anything that moves. Immensely powerful jaw muscles make the tiger's canine teeth deadly weapons that can crunch the vertebrae of large prey. The rear teeth are strong enough they can crush bones and shear off lumps of meat, which are swallowed whole. The tiger eats until it fills its belly, because it may be days before the cat can get in close enough to kill large prey again.

The tigress may give birth to four cubs, but usually only two survive. Tiger cubs begin to eat meat after about two months, but continue to suckle until about six months old. The cubs spend the next several months learning the techniques of stalking, attacking, and killing. At around 18 months, the cubs are almost fully grown, and start to drift away from the mother to find their own territory. Hunting is for real now as the young tiger begins the next life cycle.

Some Truths About Tigers

1. Tigers are the largest cats in the world.
2. Tiger stripes are like fingerprints -- no two are the same.
3. The word we use for a group of tigers is a "streak".
4. A tiger's stripes are only on its fur, not its skin.
5. Tigers generally prefer large, wild prey. Some favorites: pigs, deer,

antelope, buffalo, and wild cattle called gaur. Some tigers even attack elephants. Tigers also snack on smaller animals such as monkeys, birds, frogs, even porcupines.

6. Tigers rarely live more than 15 years in the wild. In captivity, due to improved diet, veterinary care and the absence of numerous other threats, their life span can extend to more than 20 years.

7. Tigers can run fast, but only for a short period of time. The fastest recorded speed of a tiger is 35 miles (about 55 km) per hour

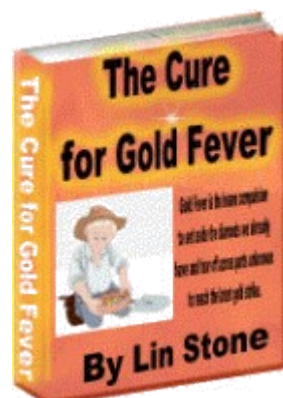
8. Unlike lions, which are social animals and live in prides (families), tigers are solitary animals that only rarely meet, except to mate

9. All tigers belong to the same species, Panthera Tigris. There were originally eight tiger subspecies: Bengal, Siberian, South China, Indochinese, Sumatran, Javan, Bali and Caspian. Three are already extinct: Javan, Bali and Caspian. One of them, the South China tiger, with perhaps less than 20 left, is on the brink of extinction.

10. Some big cats, such as lions, live in groups. But adult tigers are generally solitary, with the exception of mother tigers with young cubs. Cubs leave their mother at about 18 to 24 months of age

11. The beautiful and popular white tiger is actually a mutated strain of Bengal tiger. Rare but widely bred in captivity, all captive white tigers are descended from one male named Mohan, captured in northern India in 1951.

12.No tigers purr. In fact, purring is one of the attributes used to separate the so-called "small" species of cat from those known as "large".



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Humans don't have enough troubles of their own so they deliberately mix things up. Today we have hybrid corn, hybrid cotton, hybrid pigeons, and there are even such things as

Hybrid Cats

Lets start with Ligers and Tigons

The first time a liger was pointed out to me I supposed it was a lion and had to ASK what the differences were. At last I could see that the ear markings were reversed.

Ligers and tigons are hybrids, the children of the pairing of a lion and a tiger. Both hybrids have a combination of lion and tiger physical traits. The offspring of a lion-tiger share the conflicting instincts of both parents. Sometimes they seek out interaction with other big cats, but other times they will attack them. So, they can be a danger if they are raised with other big cats.

Ligers are the largest of the big cats. Ligers have lion fathers and tiger mothers. Lions are very social animals while tigers tend to be solitary. They can weigh up to about 1500 pounds (680kg), and stand up to 13 feet (4 m) tall on their hind legs. Ligers usually grow much bigger than either of their parents, and female ligers (sometimes called ligresses) can sometimes have babies. In general ligers are gentle, even-tempered and tolerant. The Ligers look more like their lion fathers with a hint of light striping on their backs and faces.

Tigons all have tiger fathers and lion mothers. They are usually tinier than either one of their parents. Tigons are sometimes called dwarfs, tions and tilons; while they do not exhibit many signs of dwarfism, fully grown tigons of both sexes usually weigh less than 350 pounds (160 kg), which is small for male lions or tigers.

Tigons have more defined striping like their tiger fathers. Like tigers, each striping pattern is unique to each individual animal. Tigons can also have small manes or spots.

Ligers were originally assumed to be sterile, which is true for most hybrid species, such as the mule, a cross between a horse and a donkey. However, females can be fertile. There are such things as li-ligers and li-tigons along with ti-ligers and ti-tigons - these are mixes of ligers and tigons with lions and tigers.

Emotional Problems in Hybrid Cats

Science is constantly looking for the new and different. Recent history has seen an increase in breeding two different species of big cats to produce hybrid species. We are just now beginning to see the psychological consequences of such practices.

As well as partial fertility and growth dysplasia, some hybrid big cats exhibit emotional or behavioral conflicts due to their mixed ancestry. They may also inherit different or mixed vocabularies (tigers "chuff", lions roar). A purebred mother may also become confused by her hybrid offspring's unusual behavior. Lions rarely climb trees or play in water. A lioness who produced leopon (leopard x lioness) cubs was reportedly distressed by her offspring's tendency to climb trees and play in water. These traits were inherited from their leopard father. Tigons may also inherit a fascination with water to the distress or confusion of their lioness mother.

Ligers and tigons may exhibit conflicts between the social habits of the lion and the solitary habits of the tiger. Their lion heritage wants them to form prides, but their tiger heritage urges them to be intolerant of company. Opponents of deliberate hybridization say this causes confusion and depression for the animals, especially after sexual maturity. How much of their behavior is due to conflicting instincts and how much is due to abnormal hormones or the stress of captive conditions is not fully known.

In second-generation hybrids (ti-liger, ti-tigon, li-liger, li-tigon), the behavioural traits, as well as the conformation and markings, become closer to that of the species whose genes predominate. Other hybrids (jagulep/jagleop) and complex hybrids (lijagulep) are too rare, and have not been kept in natural enough conditions, for much to be known of emotional or behavioral conflicts.

Big Cats as Pets

The first time I met a full grown tiger on a leash I did like everyone else on the street, I backed up against the wall and waited for the cat and the owner to sweep by. She was so proud of herself she was strutting, beaming with pride at having such a marvelous animal on a leash. People are often intrigued by the dream of keeping big wild cats as pets, but what kind of pets do tigers, lions, bobcats, and other big cats make?

Tigers and lions are surprisingly easy and inexpensive to purchase as pets. This means anyone can own a large powerful carnivore whether or not they are equipped to properly care for them. Pet tigers have been involved in several fatalities and maulings in the US in recent years.

Even the smaller of the non-domestic cats, such as bobcats, servals, and lynx, are not at all like domestic cats. They have a different set of instincts that the owner will have to adjust to. Different species have different temperaments, but anyone of these big cats can exhibit unwanted behavior from urine marking to aggression.

It is a huge commitment and responsibility to properly care for even the smaller wild cats such as bobcats. Most of these cats will need spacious outdoor cages in order to thrive. The large cats such as lions, tigers, leopards, and cougars are even more problematic. Even if they are not overtly aggressive, their natural tendencies must be remembered. They are predators, and even at play their huge size and strength makes them a threat.

Many people do keep big cats like bobcats, tigers, and lions as pets and do so safely. Most owners of big cats find it is no trouble to go out of their way to provide appropriate housing and diet and have no problems. However, the owners can become terrified of their pets, and a great number of pet tigers and other big cats end up shut up in cellars, neglected, abused, or given up to sanctuaries when their owners cannot or will not care for them.

In the long run, it is a huge responsibility bringing home a big cat to join your family. You need to take time to think it through completely before doing so.

The Big Cats in Zoos

For many years it was held that certain species of cat, for example the cheetah and clouded leopard, were difficult to breed successfully in captivity. This idea has undergone a change. People are becoming more aware of what is needed by each species for increased breeding success- prospective partners who fail to mate are often substituted with animals from neighboring zoos, with often greater success

The control of breeding cats within zoos is of utmost importance - to assist in maintaining genetic diversity within the relatively small captive populations, zoos in the 1980's acted internationally to establish breeding programs.

Aided with data from zoos individual breeding programs, international 'stud books' are kept for many of the species, enabling zoos to set up exchange programs for suitable animals on a world-wide basis. With the data available to zoos today, it will hopefully be possible to maintain healthy and genetically viable populations of purebred sub species for many years to come.

The captive management of wild cats both big and small is now a sophisticated, world wide effort - with some sub species of cats such as the Snow leopard, Amur tiger, South China tiger, Amur and Persian leopards it may provide one of the animals last chances of survival if conservation efforts for the cats in their natural environment fails to stop their demise.

The end

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