



KENYA NATIONAL  
SPELLING  
**BEE**

LEARN THAT WORD

**THE**

**CATS**

**FAMILY**

**(Cheetah, Jaguar, Tigers, Lions & Leopards)**

# THE CATS FAMILY



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This is where you'll discover fun (and furry!) animal facts about our planet's incredible wildlife. From majestic mammals and soaring birds to super sea creatures and curious creepy crawlies – it's an animal lover's dream!



**Speed:**

93 km/h  
(Maximum, In Short Bursts, Running).

**Mass:**

21 – 72 kg (Adult).

**Scientific name:**

Acinonyx jubatus.

**Gestation period:**

90 – 98 days.

**Family:**

Felidae.

**Class:**

Mammalia.

1. Nearly all **wild cheetahs** can be found in **sub-Saharan Africa**, where they roam in the open, grassy savannah plains and open forests. A small population lives in **North-eastern Iran**, although only a few dozen remain there.
2. These big cats' bodies grow to between **1.1m and 1.4m metres long**, plus a tail measuring **65cm to 80cm**. Their weight ranges from **21kg to 72kg**, males being slightly heavier.
3. Cheetahs have a **pale-yellow coat with black dots on the upper parts**, and are white on the underbelly. Their faces are **distinguished by prominent**, black lines that curve from the inner corner of each eye to the outer corners of the mouth.
4. During a chase, cheetahs can take up to **150 breaths per minute**.
5. The distinctive **fluff of the cubs is a mantle**, and gives them the appearance of having Mohawks.
6. A cheetah can live up to **12 years** in the wild, and **20** in captivity.
7. A female cheetah tends to **roam and they form home ranges**, which tend to overlap with other lands.
8. If a mother takes **her cubs** with her during the hunt, she will hide them in the **thick underbrush** for safety.
9. The tail is used as a **rudder for steering** whilst chasing.
10. Sadly, this beautiful animal is threatened by loss of **habitat and prey**, as well as **conflict with humans**. As a result, the cheetah is classified as vulnerable on the **IUCN Red list**, and, today, an estimated **9,000-12,000** remain in Africa.

(Source; Science Kids, National Geographic Kids and WWF)

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**Height:**

63 – 76 cm  
(Adult, at Shoulder).

**Mass:**

56 – 96 kg (Adult).

**Scientific name:**

Panthera onca.

**Lifespan:**

12 – 15 years  
(In the wild).

**Conservation status:**

Near Threatened  
(Population decreasing).

**Length:**

1.2 – 2M (Adult, Nose  
to the base of the tail).

1. The word '**jaguar**' comes from the indigenous word '**yaguar**', which means '**he who kills with one leap**'.
2. The jaguars' **stronghold** is in Brazil – it may hold around half of the estimated 170,000 wild jaguars. Most of these big cats are found in the Amazon rainforest and the Pantanal, the largest tropical wetland.
3. Jaguars are the **largest** of South America's big cats and the third largest cats in the world.
4. Their **fur** is usually tan or orange with black spots, called "**rosettes**" because they are shaped like roses.
5. Jaguars are **mammals**. They are carnivores and eat a diet rich in meat and fish.
6. The jaguar stalks and ambushes its **prey**, often leaping into water or from a tree.
7. The jaguar has a very **powerful** jaw; its bite exerts more force than that of a lion.
8. Jaguars **live** in the wild for 11-15 years, in captivity they can live for over 20 years.
9. Argentina's national **rugby team** badge includes a jaguar. However, a historical error resulted in the team being nicknamed to this day, Los Pumas (the pumas).
10. Jaguars **live** alone and mark their territory with their waste or by clawing trees.

(Source; Science Kids, National Geographic Kids and WWF)

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#### Conservation status:

Endangered  
(Population decreasing).

#### Scientific name:

Panthera tigris

#### Lifespan:

10 – 15 years  
(In the wild)

#### Mass:

**Male:**  
90 – 310 kg  
(Adult),

**Female:**  
65 – 170 kg  
(Adult)

#### Diet:

Carnivore

#### 1. Tigers are the largest wild cats in the world.

Adults can weigh up to **363kg** (that's about the same as ten-year old!) and measure up to **3.3m!**

#### 2. Tigers are carnivores (eating only meat).

They mainly feed on large mammals such as deer, wild pigs, antelope and buffalo.

#### 3. Tigers are solitary hunters and generally search for food alone at night.

They quietly stalk their prey until they are close enough to pounce – then they kill their victim with a bite to the neck or back of the head. Ouch!

#### 4. Tigers are good swimmers.

Unlike most members of the cat family, they like water and often cool off in pools or streams.

#### 5. There are more tigers held privately as pets than there are in the wild.

#### 6) At full speed, tigers can reach up to 65km/h.

That's right – they may be big and heavy, but tigers are by no means slow movers.

#### 7) These fierce felines have walked the earth for a long time.

Fossil remains of tigers found in parts of China are believed to be **2 million years old**. Yikes!

#### 8) No two tigers have the same stripes.

Since every tiger has their own pattern on their fur, they are all unique!

#### 9) Various tiger subspecies are the national animals of Bangladesh, India, North Korea, South Korea and Malaysia.

10) Tigers that breed with lions give birth to hybrids known as tigons and ligers.

(Source; National Geographic Kids and WWF)

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#### Lifespan:

10 – 14 years  
(Adult, In the wild).

#### Scientific name:

Panthera leo.

#### Speed:

80 km/h  
(Maximum, In Short Bursts).

#### Gestation period:

110 days.

#### Mass:

Male; 190 kg  
(Adult), Female; 130 kg  
(Adult).

#### Diet:

Carnivore.

1. Lions are the **second largest** big cat species in the world (behind tigers).
2. The average male lion **weighs** around 190 kg while the average female lion weighs around 130 kg.
3. Lions are **very social** compared to other cat species, often living in prides that feature females, offspring and a few adult males.
4. Lions can reach **speeds** of up to 81 kph (50 mph) but only in short bursts because of a lack of stamina.
5. The **roar** of a lion can be heard from 8 kilometres (5.0 miles) away.
6. Most lions **found** in the wild live in southern and eastern parts of Africa.
7. When lions **breed** with tigers the resulting hybrids are known as ligers and tigons. There are also lion and leopard hybrids known as leopons and lion and jaguar hybrids known as jaglions.
8. Lion cubs are **born with** blue eyes that change to amber or brown when around the age of two to three months.
9. Lions have one of the most **complex communication** behaviours of any of the cats. They can make a variety of calls which include roars, grunts, moans, growls, snarls, meows, purrs, hums, puffs and woofs.
10. Lions **scent mark** their territory, using their pee, to create a border.

(Source; Science Kids, Folly Farm and Maasai Mara Lions)

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**Speed:**  
58 km/h  
(Running).

**Scientific name:**  
Panthera pardus.

**Gestation period:**  
90 – 105 days.

**Lifespan:**  
12 – 17 years.

**Mass:**  
**Male;** 31 kg  
(South Africa's coastal  
mountains population),  
**Female;**  
23 – 27 kg  
(Somalia population)

**Height:**  
Male; 60 – 70 cm  
(Adult, at Shoulder),  
Female; 57 – 64 cm  
(Adult, at Shoulder)

1. Most leopards are **light coloured and have dark spots on their fur**. These spots are called "**rosettes**" because their shape is similar to that of a rose. There are also **black leopards**, too, whose spots are hard to see because their fur is so dark.
2. The **lifespan** of a leopard is between 12 and 17 years in the wild, and up to 23 years in captivity.
3. Leopards can **be found in various places around the world** – they live in Sub-Saharan Africa, Northeast Africa, Central Asia, India and China.
4. **Nocturnal animals** - leopards are active at night when they venture out in search of food. They mostly spend their days resting, camouflaged in the trees or hiding in caves.
5. Leopards are renowned for their **agility**. They run up to 58 km/h (36 mph) and can leap 6 meters (20 feet) horizontally and 3 meters (10 feet) vertically. They are also very strong swimmers.
6. Leopards are **astoundingly strong**. They are pound for pound the strongest of the big cats. This means if all the big cats were the same size and weight, the leopard would be the strongest.
7. These big cats have a **varied diet** and enjoy different kinds of grub. They eat bugs, fish, antelope, monkeys, rodents, deer...in fact, pretty much any prey that is available!
8. They are **able to climb trees**, even when carrying heavy prey, and often choose to rest on tree branches during the day. One reason why leopards sometimes take their prey up in the trees is to ensure lions or hyenas can't steal from them.
9. Adult leopards are **solitary animals**. Each adult leopard has its own territory where it lives and, although they often share parts of it, they try to avoid one another.
10. Leopards have a **gestation period** of approximately 3 months and typically give birth to a litter of 2 to 3 cubs.

(Source; Science Kids, Folly Farm and Maasai Mara Lions)

# Did you enjoy facts about the cat family?

*Attempt to answer the below quiz and learn more about the cat family.*

## CHEETAHS

1. True or False? Cheetahs have a pale-yellow coat with black dots on the upper parts \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the scientific name for a cheetah?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How many breathes per minute can a cheetah take during a chase? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the fastest land animal in the world?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How many years can a cheetah live in captivity?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## JAGUARS

6. Which big cat is recognizable thanks to its rosette markings?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. True or False? Jaguars live alone and mark their territory with their waste or by clawing trees  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Jaguars feed on?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. In which Country do we have the highest population of Jaguars?  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. True or False? Jaguar is the largest type of "big cat" in the world. \_\_\_\_\_

## TIGERS

1. What is the largest type of 'big cat' in the world?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the scientific name for a tiger?  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. True or False? Tigers that breed with lions give birth to hybrids known as tigons and ligers  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. At full speed, tigers can reach up to how many km/h? \_\_\_\_\_

5. True or False? Tigers are good swimmers  
\_\_\_\_\_

## LIONS

1. True or false? The roar of a lion can be heard from 8 kilometres (5.0 miles) away \_\_\_\_\_
2. Groups of lions are known as?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. True or False? Lions scent mark their territory, using their pee, to create a border \_\_\_\_\_
4. How do we call the young one of a lion?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. In which part of the world do we find the most lion breeds?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## LEOPARDS

1. What do we call the dark spots on a leopard's fur?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the life span of leopards in the wild and captivity?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Name at least 3 diets in a leopard's meal?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. True or False? Leopards are the strongest in the cat family \_\_\_\_\_
5. True or False? Leopards are nocturnal animals.  
\_\_\_\_\_



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