

Explore the

Big Cats

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Foreword

Wikijunior books welcomes you to the children's book "Wild Cats". Wild cats are some of Earth's grandest treasures, and their stories excite the imagination of kids of all ages. Many of these lords of the wild are endangered, and the children who will one day bear our responsibilities need to admire and love the world so they can enjoy it and pass it on as good or better than they found it. After all we appreciate what we understand, and save what we appreciate. The importance of this task has led many experts here at Wiki to donate their time and talents to bring this volume together.

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Meet the Cats

In Africa, they say that a male lion roars Ha inchi na yanni? Yangu, yangu, yangu! (Whose land is this? It is mine, mine, mine!). It is hard to listen to this ancient challenge without edging a little closer to the campfire. But what is behind that remarkable call? Certainly, to some degree, cats are cats around the world. You look at one of the neighborhood tabbies stalking a squirrel and you can see in miniature a tiger stalking deer on the meadows of Rhanthambore. And yet partly because they are so majestic these big cats are different from the neighbor's feline.

For one thing they are the lords of their kingdom and travel confidence where small creatures scurry and hide. For many years, all they had to fear was each other, but the invention of gunpowder threatened to destroy this kingdom and send its feline lords to extinction. Fortunately there are more people like you that see big cats more as a companion to be admired rather than an enemy to be destroyed. Learn more about these great cats and their remarkable world. After all, we appreciate what we understand, and save what we appreciate.

Superb Predators

Big cats are among nature's grandest predators. A grizzly bear may have a slight size advantage over a Siberian tiger, but the tiger is far more agile and quick. A wolf may have a better sense of smell than a jaguar, but a jaguar can handle large prey alone. Cats have excellent night vision, sharp hearing and enormous physical strength. Their strong yet graceful movements and the camouflage patterns on their fur help them sneak up on their prey.

On the Menu

Cats hunt because they need meat to survive. Animals that eat grass and leaves have special stomachs that allow bacteria time to break down complex plant sugars into the simpler sugars animals can digest. Cats have a very short digestive tract that quickly breaks down meat and extracts its energy and building materials. Cats cannot survive on a diet of grass.

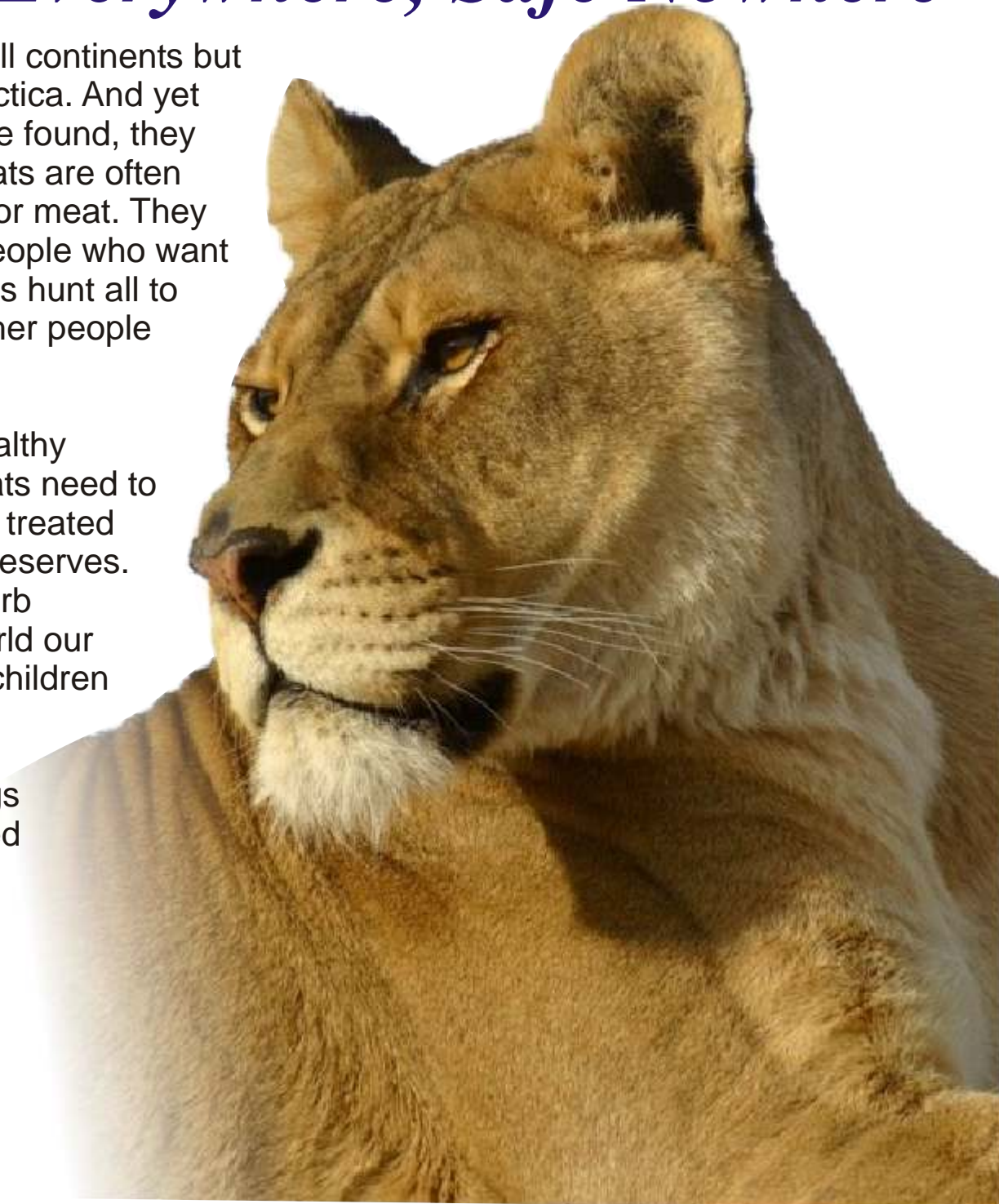
Intelligence

Cats are among the most intelligent species on Earth. In intelligence they are ranked just behind primates (monkeys and apes) and cetaceans (whales and dolphins). Lions use group strategies to tackle large and dangerous prey. All cats are very curious and can learn quickly. Large predators require intelligence to be successful as hunters. Mother cats spend a long time (one to two years) teaching their offspring the many things they need to know in order to survive.

Found Everywhere, Safe Nowhere

Cats are native to all continents but Australia and Antarctica. And yet everywhere they are found, they are endangered. Cats are often hunted for their fur or meat. They are also killed by people who want the animals that cats hunt all to themselves. Still other people hunt cats for sport.

Just as bad, the healthy environment that cats need to survive is not being treated with the respect it deserves. To keep these superb predators in the world our children and grandchildren will live in, we must learn to make room for other living things to use Earth's limited resources.



Lion

The majestic lion is the embodiment of wild Africa. They are large, bold and ruggedly beautiful, fierce on the hunt, and still tender to their young and loyal to their companions.

Places where lions live are marked in dark green



Where do lions live?

Despite the nickname *King of the Jungle*, most lions live on the flat, grassy plains called savannas. In ancient times, lions roamed nearly every continent. Today, they can commonly be found across central and southern Africa. There is also a small population in the Gir forest of India.



What do they look like?

Lions have **tawny** fur. They grow to a length of about 10 feet (3 m) and stand about 4 feet (1.2 m) tall. Male lions are larger than the lionesses (females), weighing as much as five men or about 550 lb (250 kg). The more slender lioness usually weighs about as much as three and a half men or 400 lb (180 kg).

Adult males can be recognized by the furry mane around their heads and down their necks. For some lions the mane even runs along the belly. There is no other big cat with such a dramatic difference in appearance between males and females. Both lions and lionesses have tufts on the end of their tails, something no other cat has. The tail of a male lion has a sharp bone tucked into the tail tuft. One old legend claims that lions would use the tail spur to whip themselves into a frenzy before fighting.

What do lions eat?

Lions eat large prey, such as gazelles, zebras, wildebeests, and buffalo. However, they have been known to take down prey as large as a young giraffe. When food becomes scarce, lions will sometimes eat the kills of other animals or hunt smaller prey.

How do they raise their young?

The lion cubs are raised in prides which are family groups of related female lions, their cubs (both male and female), and an unrelated male, who fathers the cubs. The female lions do most of the hunting, bringing back meat for the pride's cubs, while the male lion defends the pride's territory from other lions. When a younger male lion is fully grown, he usually has to leave the pride, though once in a while they can take over their own pride.



How do they hunt?

Lions are social animals, living in large groups called prides. Prides are made up of one to three related adult males, along with as many as thirty females and cubs. Females do most of the hunting in groups.

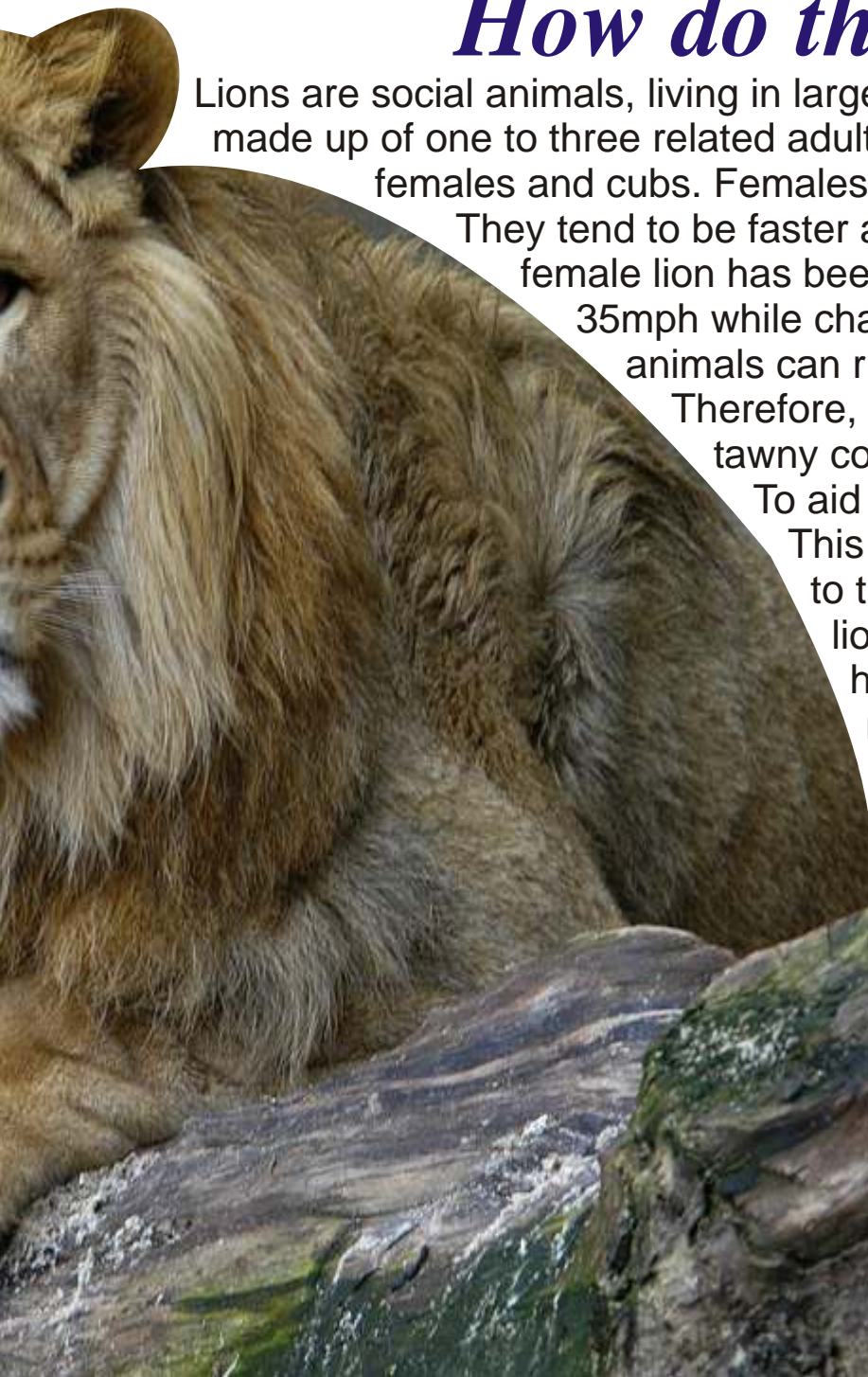
They tend to be faster and better hunters than males. The female lion has been known to reach speeds as high as 35mph while chasing prey. However, most prey animals can run much faster than the average lion.

Therefore, lions must stalk their prey, using their tawny coats as camouflage in the tall grass.

To aid in camouflage, lions hunt at night.

This allows the group of lions to get close to the prey. When the time is right, the lions charge. While lions might spend hours stalking prey, the kill is made in minutes.

When a kill is made, the females will let out low roars. This tells the pride to join them for a meal. Adult males eat first, followed by females, and then cubs. While males do not do the hunting, they do serve an important role in the pride. The male lion is much stronger than the female. This makes him an able protector. Male lions use their muscles and fighting skills to guard the land and keep enemies away.



Tiger

A well rounded athlete, the tiger can climb (though not well), swim, leap great distances and pull with five times the force of a strong human. The tiger is the largest and most powerful cat.

Where do tigers live?

They live in forests and grasslands of eastern

Places where tigers live are marked in dark green



and southeastern Asia. Tigers live in countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, Indonesia (Java and Sumatra), and eastern Russia. The Bengal Tiger is the national animal of India.



What do they look like?

Tigers are usually orange or reddish orange with very bold black stripes, and white areas on the chest, neck and inside of the legs. Their stripes help them camouflage into the trees and shrubs keeps them from being seen by other animals. A few tigers, all of them descendents of tigers that lived in India, are white with black stripes. This bright color variation never became common in nature because it makes it harder for tigers to hide from their prey.

- Head/body length: 5 feet 10 inches - 9 feet 1 inch. A large tiger might be 10 feet (3 meters) long
- Tail length: 36 inches (91 cm)
- Weight: 350-550 pounds (160-250 kg)
- Colors: white, or bright fawn – reddish tan, white underneath.

- Very strong teeth and jaws
- Heavily padded paws
- Uneven black stripes all over them which vary with each individual tiger.
- Strong jaws
- Short and thick fur and thick long whiskers.

What do tigers eat?

Tigers mostly eat plant-eaters, or **herbivores**, like elk, deer, wild pigs, and buffalo. Like the majority of other cats, they hunt alone. Tigers often hide close to the ground and wait for the perfect moment to ambush their prey.



People avoid tiger attacks by using a face-mask on the back of their heads. Tigers prefer to approach from behind and think twice about pouncing when they can see a face.

Fortunately, they rarely attack humans unless they are too ill to hunt their normal prey.

How do they raise their young?

Tigers have 1-5 cubs per litter, with an average of 2-3. After 8 weeks of age the cubs begin to join the mother for hunting. They usually have learned how to successfully kill prey by the age of 6 months but are not ready for independence until 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 years of age. The father plays no role in their upbringing, though

there are occasionally reports of male tigers socializing with their mates and cubs outside the breeding season.

Cool Fact

Tigers are striped through and through. If you were to shave a tiger, and few ever have, you would see the stripes on the skin.

Do not try this at home.

Puma

The Puma is a big cat that is sometimes called a "mountain lion", but they are more closely related to leopards than to lions. In some places, pumas are called cougar, mountain lion, catamount, or painted cat.

Where do pumas live?



Places where pumas live are marked in dark green

Pumas can be found almost anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, in North and South America. They can be seen from northern British Columbia in Canada to the Southern end of the Andes mountain range.

What do pumas look like?

Most pumas are a light brown color, with black-tipped ears and tail. The pumas that live closest to the Equator are the smallest, and increase in size in populations closer to the poles. (This sort of size increase is seen in tigers too. The smallest ones live in the tropics, the largest Siberian tigers live far to the north where winters are very cold.) The endangered Florida Panther is the smallest of the Pumas. Like many other cats, they can retract their sharp claws into their paws, which have four toes. The largest male pumas can be as big as eight feet (2.4 meters) long, and females can be as large as seven feet (2.1 meters). The males weigh in a bit less than the average Adult at about 150 pounds (70 kilograms), with females weighing even smaller at 75 pounds (35 kilograms) or less.



How do pumas raise their young

Pumas are born in litters of 2-4 kittens and raised by their mothers. When they are born they weigh about one pound (about half a kilogram) and are about one foot (30 cm) in length. The kittens have dark spots that fade by the time they are 8-12 months old. The mother teaches them to hunt, and when they are a year and a half to two years old (and have their adult teeth) the kittens separate from their mother and find their



own territory, though the siblings might stay together for a while after they separate from their mother.



What do pumas eat?

Pumas eat other animals, mostly large animals like deer. Because the puma can run very fast, as much as 30 mph (50 km/h), and because they can jump 20 ft (6 m) from a standing position, they can very easily catch slower animals.

Pumas can jump 8 ft (2.5 m) straight up and can climb on rocks and in trees to hunt. Their bite is very strong, much stronger than a strong dog's bite, and their largest teeth are about twice the size of a large dog's teeth.

Pumas have a very powerful hunting instinct, and have sometimes been known to chase and catch humans on bicycles. A favorite food for pumas is the deer, but they will also eat smaller animals. In areas where pumas and people live close together, pumas have hunted dogs and cats for food, but they usually do not hunt people for food. If you are around a puma, it is better not to run fast or to ride a bicycle, because their instinct is to chase, catch and kill running animals.

Cheetah

A fast mover, the Cheetah can sprint for very short distances at very high speed. They cannot retain this speed for long, unlike their prey. Cheetahs are the fastest land animal in the world.

Where do cheetas live?



Today, most cheetahs that are found in sub-Saharan Africa, though a few are still seen in Iran. In the past, they used to be found throughout northern India and Iran. They prefer to live in semi-deserts, savannas, prairies, and thick brush. Because they rely upon speed to hunt, they avoid dense forests.

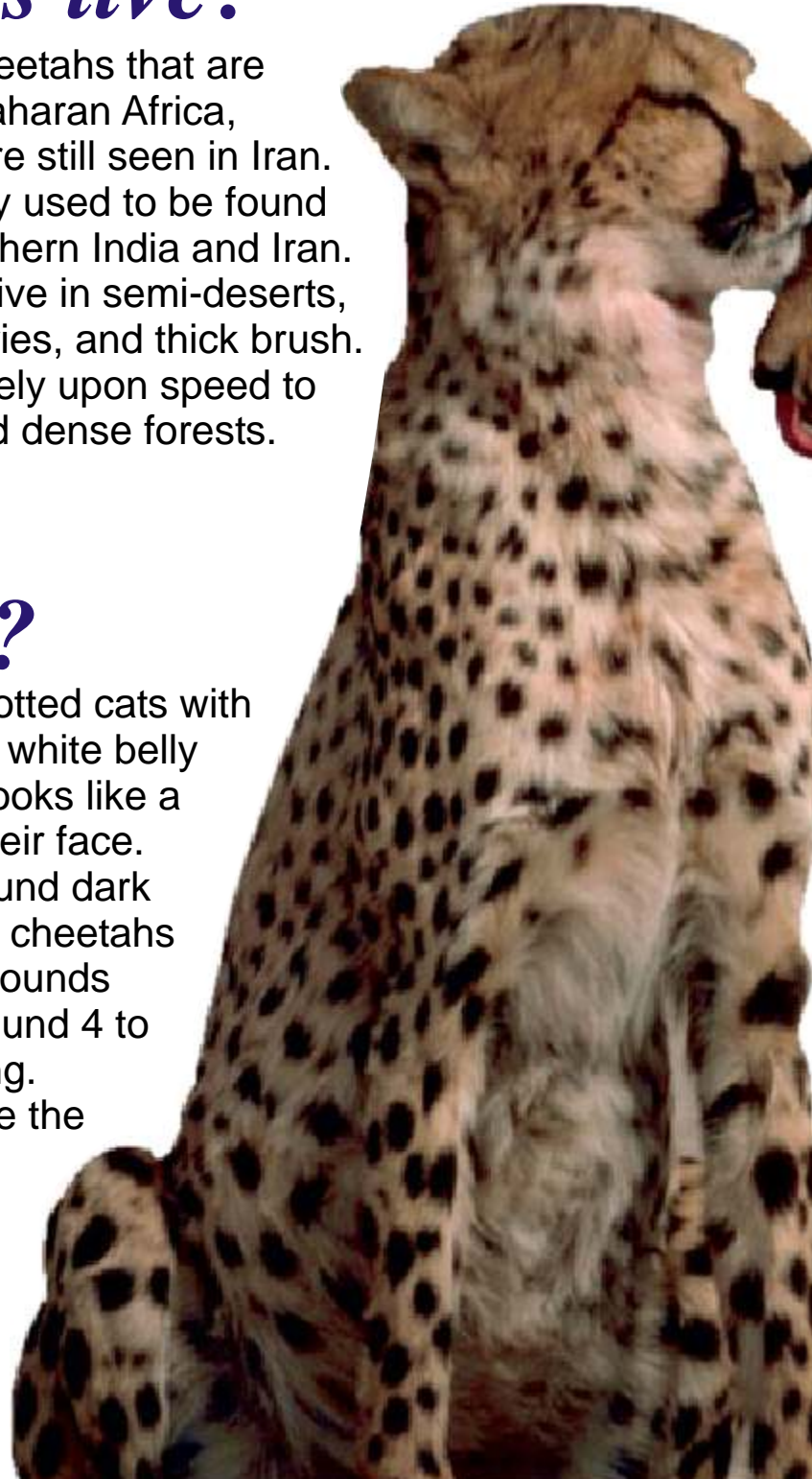
What do cheetas look like?

Cheetahs are medium-sized doglike spotted cats with long legs and lean bodies. They have a white belly



and a dark stripe that looks like a tear on both sides of their face. Cheetahs also have round dark spots on their fur. Adult cheetahs weigh from 90 to 140 pounds (40-65 kg), and are around 4 to 5 feet (112-135 cm) long. Cheetahs are built to be the

best runners. They have a big chest, a narrow waist, and powerful hind legs. They have a small head and muzzle, large nostrils for increased oxygen intake, and small round ears. All of this makes the cheetah very sleek and aerodynamic when it runs.



How do cheetas raise their young?

Females give birth to three to five cubs at a time. Many cubs are killed by a lack of food or their natural enemies (lions and hyenas). An old African legend says the tear stain marks on the cheetah's face are from the mother weeping for her lost cubs. The mother cheetah must train the young cubs to hunt food for themselves so they can survive on their own. The cubs leave their mother about one or two years later,



and will usually live in groups of two or three while reaching adulthood. Female cheetahs eventually go their separate ways, but brother cheetahs usually form lifelong partnerships and share in the hunt to survive.

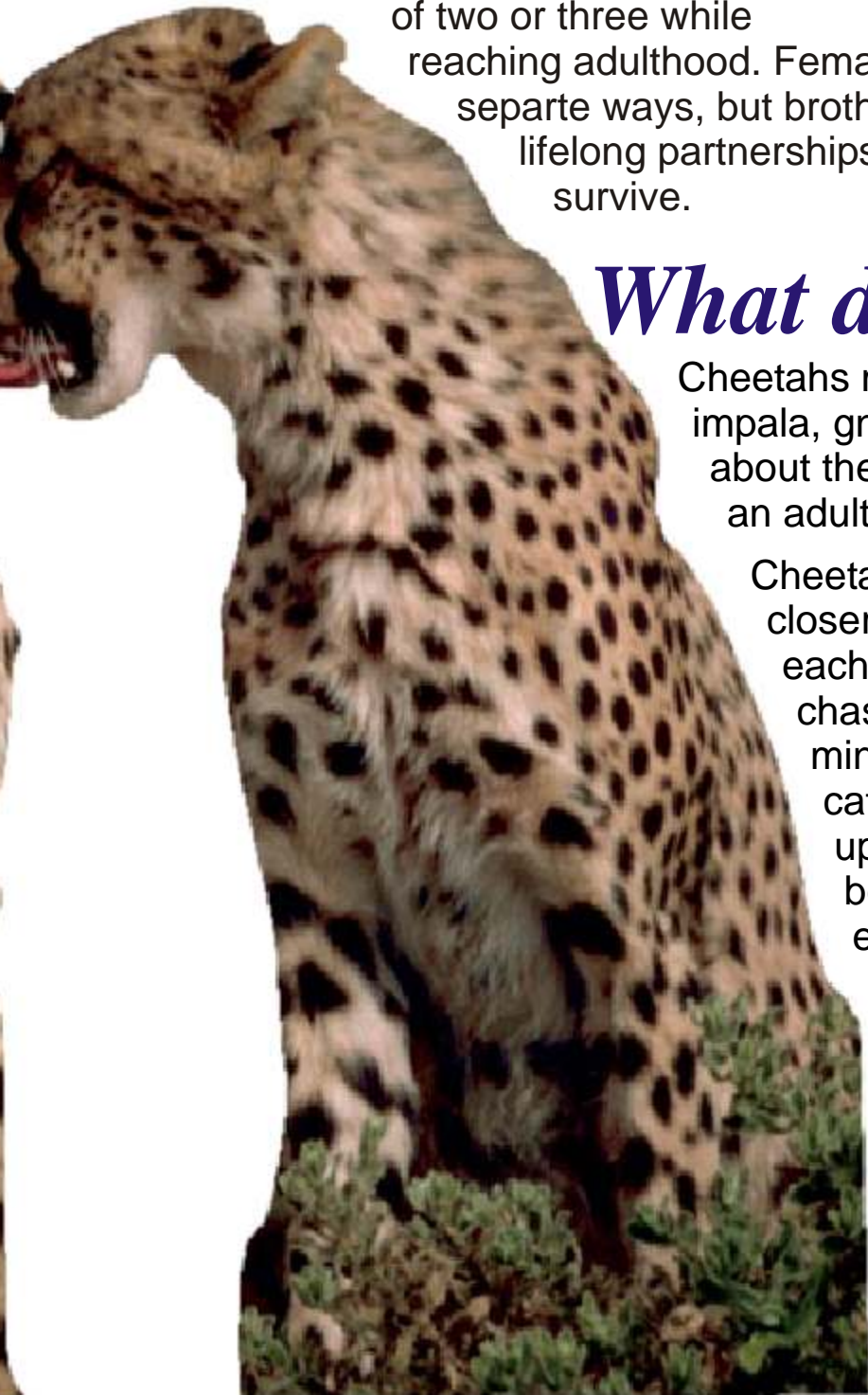
What do they eat?

Cheetahs mostly eat mammals like gazelles, impala, gnu calves, and hares, which are all about the same size as, or smaller than, an adult cheetah.

Cheetahs stalk their prey until they are closer than about thirty meters from each other, and then give chase. The chase is usually over in less than a minute and if the cheetah doesn't catch its prey quickly it will often give up rather than waste energy. This is because cheetahs use a lot of energy when chasing prey at such high speed. About half of the chases are successful.

Cheetahs must eat their catch quickly or risk losing their food to other stronger predators.

Cheetahs will not fight with a larger animal over food because they can't risk an injury which would mean certain starvation.



Lynx

These odd-shaped, ruff-faced cats are not as lordly as the lion or powerful as the tiger. They are too big to bother with mice and too small to tackle a healthy adult deer. But they do one job rather well--keeping rabbits in control.

Where do lynx live?



The four species of lynx are very widespread. The European Lynx lives in northern Europe and Asia. The Canadian Lynx lives in North America. The Iberian (or Spanish) Lynx is one of the most

highly endangered cats and only lives in wild parts of Spain. Bobcats are the smallest type of lynx, living in North America. Because they hunt small prey, they live in a wide variety of habitats.

What do lynx look like?

Not all lynx look the same. Some of them have dark spots, while others have plain yellow or gray fur. All of them have white bellies. Lynx have long hairs at the tops of their ears, and a beard around their jaw. A bobcat is much smaller than a regular lynx, lacks the distinctive ear tufts, and looks more like a big house cat. They have smaller feet and shorter legs compared to other lynx, and almost always have spots.

The most unique part on the lynx and bobcat is their tail. The bobcat was named after its tail, because it is "bobbed" or short. Their tails are about half the length of a normal house cat's tail. None of the other big cats have this unique trait.



What do lynx eat?

Lynx eat mainly arctic hares (a large member of the rabbit family). They sometimes eat squirrels, ptarmigan (birds that look like large pigeons), and grouse (which look like fancy chickens).



Bobcats eat smaller animals like squirrels, rabbits, and mice. Their odd shape with long legs, a short neck and

short tail, is an sudden burst of they must first and

adaptation to hunting prey that must be captured with a speed and a killing pounce. In order to catch their prey, sneak up as carefully and close as they can (stalking), only make a final rushing attack when the prey makes a run for it. Obviously the closer they can approach before the run, the greater their chances of success.

How do lynx raise their young?

Lynx have three to five cubs, while bobcats usually have three cubs. No male lynxes help raise their offspring. This may sound selfish, but it is not. In the animal world, the sole responsibility for finding food for the young rests upon the female. Lynx would be too noisy hunting in pairs, and thus they would have less of a chance to catch their prey.



Lynx are born from May to June or as late as July, the time of the year when prey is most abundant. Bobcats are usually born in April or May. Before winter closes in, the female must begin teaching the young how to survive on their own. Rabbits have sensitive hearing, and the mother must teach her boisterous, playful cubs to use patience and stealth to get close enough to the rabbits for a good charge. Not all hunts are successful, even when the young are skilled hunters. The young tend to leave their mother at 10 months of age, and kits from the same litter may remain together for a while before they go their separate ways. Adult lynx are mostly solitary.



Caracal

The Caracal, also called Persian lynx, is a medium-sized wild cat. The caracal resembles a lynx and is related. Caracals are labeled as small cats but are the heaviest of all small cats as well as the fastest.

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