



INSIDE LOOK AT
BIG CATS

Written and Illustrated by © Melanie Moher

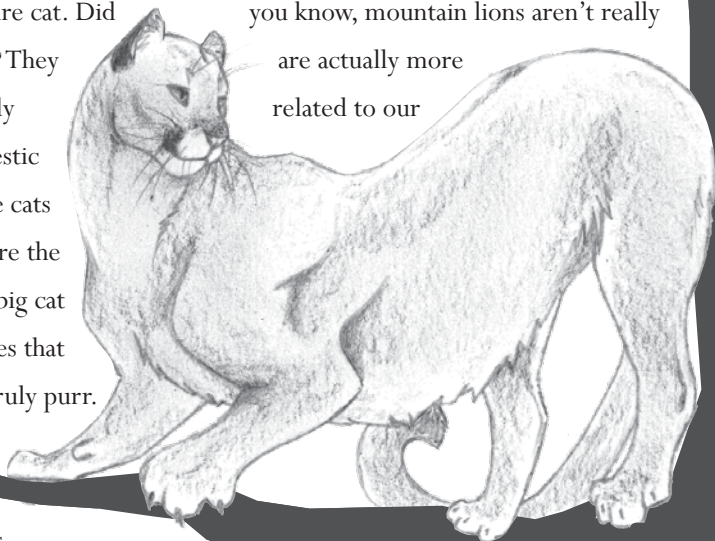
The Mountain Lion (Cougar)

(*Puma concolor*)

The Mountain Lion is a cat of many names. In fact, it holds a Guinness record for the animal with the highest number of names coming in at over 40 English names, this is because they are the only big cat that covers the largest geographical area, covering all of Canada, US, and South America. Some of the most common names are: puma, florida panther, catamount, cougar, mountain screamer, and fire cat. Did

lions? They
closely
domestic
house cats
and are the
only big cat
species that
can truly purr.
The

you know, mountain lions aren't really
are actually more
related to our



males
range from around 8 - 9
ft. long (including the tail) and weigh 130 lb.,
while the females are 6.5 - 7 ft. in length weighing in at
100 lb. In the wild they can live at around 10 years, if they
are kept in captivity they can live up to another 10 years.

The African Lion

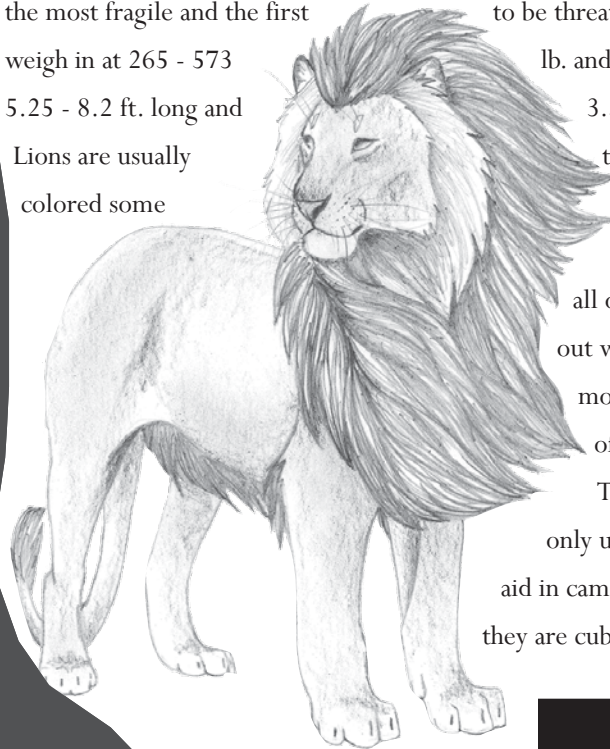
(Panthera leo)

The king of the jungle as they say, is actually the second largest big cat of the 4 cat list and mainly lives in the African savannah and Indian forests rather than a jungle. Lions are one of the most unique cat's due to their evolved mane adaptation that is there to protect them while fighting. Unlike most other big cats the lion is social and actually live in groups called prides. Their inner workings of family life are much like what you would expect from the rules of an old-school traditional family. The males are always territorial bullheaded brutes and the females always have to make dinner and care for the kids. The cubs have the bliss of innocence but their lives are always the most fragile and the first

weigh in at 265 - 573

5.25 - 8.2 ft. long and

Lions are usually colored some



to be threatened. Lion's lb. and measure

3.5 - 4 ft. tall.

tawny/tanned

are even

white, but

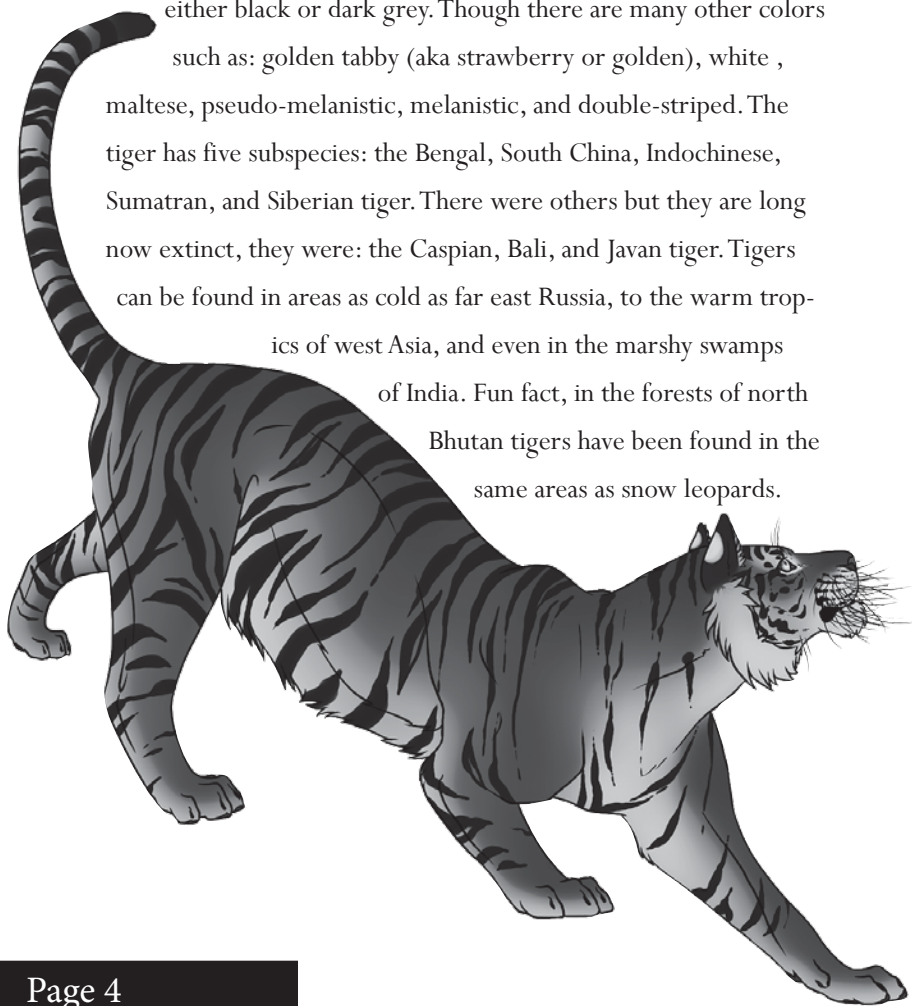
all of them start out with spots almost like those of a leopard.

Though this is only used as an aid in camouflage while they are cubs.

The Tiger

(*Panthera tigris*)

Known as the largest big cat in the world, the tiger measures in at 4.6 ft. - 10 ft. in length (including the tail), 3 - 4 ft. in height, and weighs 100 - 700 lb, depending on subspecies. Tigers almost always come in an orange coat with a lighter underbelly and striations of either black or dark grey. Though there are many other colors such as: golden tabby (aka strawberry or golden), white, maltese, pseudo-melanistic, melanistic, and double-striped. The tiger has five subspecies: the Bengal, South China, Indochinese, Sumatran, and Siberian tiger. There were others but they are long now extinct, they were: the Caspian, Bali, and Javan tiger. Tigers can be found in areas as cold as far east Russia, to the warm tropics of west Asia, and even in the marshy swamps of India. Fun fact, in the forests of north Bhutan tigers have been found in the same areas as snow leopards.

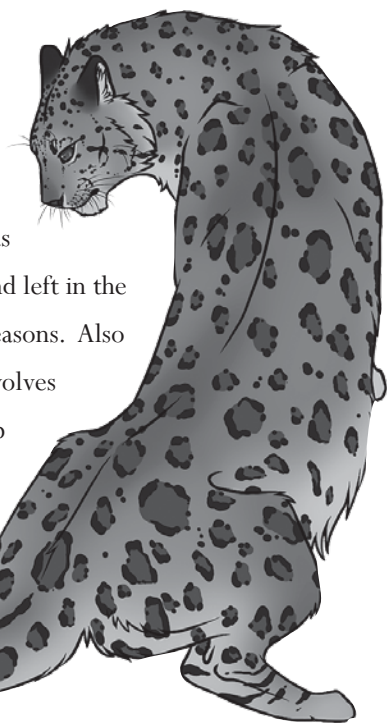


The Snow Leopard

(*Panthera uncia*)

The snow leopard is a rare treat to see, as there are only approximately six thousand left in the wild due to fur and medicinal hunting reasons. Also

the snow leopard's diet revolves mostly around wild sheep and goats, when they make the wrong move and hunt the near by domestic stock;

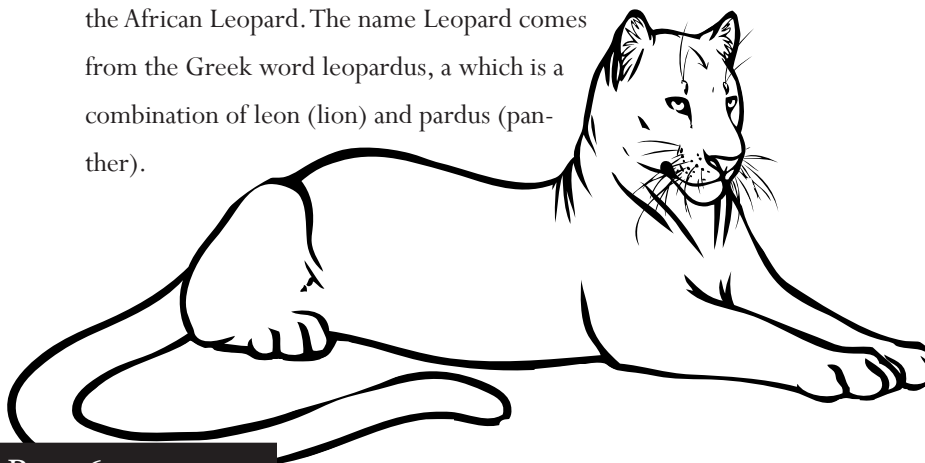


they are hunted down for destroying farmer's property. On average snow leopards can live up to 15 years, in captivity the longest living leopard was 21 years old. They are around 6 - 7.5 ft. in length (including the tail) and 2 ft. tall. What is really special about them is their eyes. Most all big cat eyes are either yellow or gold, but snow leopards always have ultra light blue or green to grey/white eyes. Another unique factor about snow leopards compared to other cats is, they are unable to roar and the fur on their feet act like snow shoes. Snow leopards can be found mainly at altitudes of 9,800 to 17,000 feet in the frigid high mountains of Central Asia. Their habitat ranges all the way from Afghanistan to Kazakhstan, north Russia, India, and east China.

The Black Leopard

(*Panthera pardus*)

Black leopards and leopards are the smallest of the four big cats, lion, tiger, and jaguar. They come in lengths of 3 - 6.5 ft. (including tail) and are only 1.5 - 2.6 ft. tall and weigh between 82 - 150 lbs. However they have the most wide spread range of territory than the other big cats due to their highly unsocial characteristics. Black leopards are the same species as leopards, what makes them black is a recessive melanistic color gene. The leopard pattern is still visible but only in direct sunlight and the correct angle. Black leopards are also called black panthers or just panther for short. The name Black Panther is a general name given to any big cat that is black, mainly leopards and jaguars. In Latin America the word means black jaguar, in Africa and Asia it means black leopard, in America it means black cougar, which are really a very dark brown not total black. There are nine recognized subspecies of leopard all of which can be found in Asia, South Asia, and India; except for the African Leopard. The name Leopard comes from the Greek word leopardus, a which is a combination of leon (lion) and pardus (panther).

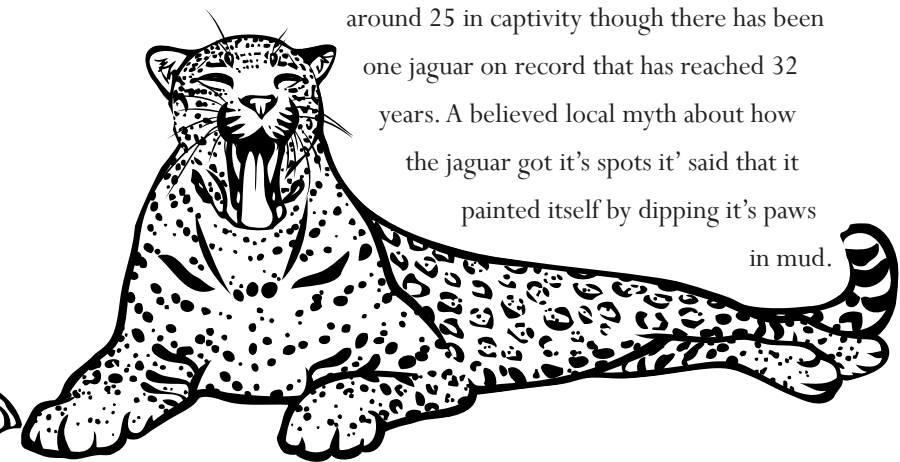


The Jaguar

(Panthera onca)

The jaguar and the leopard are very similar to untrained eyes but in fact they are two different cats. They both have a rosette pattern of spots but if you look closely the jaguar has tiny spots within their rosettes and their rosettes are noticeably larger as well. The jaguar is the largest cat of the Americas and third largest in the four big cat list following the lion and the tiger. They measure up to a max of 7 ft. long (including tail) and 1.5 ft. - 3 ft. tall and weigh 150 - 200 lbs. Their habitat is in North America, Central America, and South America, but since the 1940's they are mainly located in Mexico and Brazil. Their coat colors can differ from the common golden or tawny to reddish brown and even black, like the leopard. The word jaguar comes from the ancient Indian name "yaguar" which means "the killer which overcomes its prey in a single bound." Jaguar's live up to 11 years old in the wild and somewhere

around 25 in captivity though there has been one jaguar on record that has reached 32 years. A believed local myth about how the jaguar got its spots it said that it painted itself by dipping its paws in mud.



The big cats

we are honored to be in the presence of are a sight to see, though they are quickly loosing their resources and so are we. If we continue to hunt them down for their fur and organs or as trophies, for killing livestock or the fear of them causing harm, they will cease to exist. Much like the:

- Tasmanian Tiger
- American Lion
- Scimitar Cats

As of now all big cats are endangered and protected against poaching. Though the battle is not over. They are threatened by habitat loss and degradation. This is not only to protect them it is to protect all the other animals that live within their native land and to ourselves. Wildlife preservation has always been important. We just need to be reminded of why.

Support the Big Cats of today by getting involved with National Geographic's "Cause an Uproar" campaign. What they do with the money donated is help make natural enclosures and provide livestock insurance for farmer's to prevent the cat's from causing conflict with humans. We are the major problem big cats are disappearing so anything to help create peace will stop the confrontations.

How to join:

1. Visit <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/big-cats/>
2. Read about the cause and maybe do some shopping.
3. If you don't find something you like make a donation, even if it's a small one. Every little bit counts.

The big cats will thank you.