



Cat Comparison

Audience

Activity designed for ages 12 years and up.

Goal

Students will be able to identify key characteristics of cats.

Objective

- To learn where cat species are found.
- To be able to identify members of the family Felidae by just the silhouette and fur pattern.

Conservation Message

Many cat species, such as lions, tigers, cheetahs and leopards are encountering humans more and more in their native range. Many of these cats are native to areas with a lot of agriculture land and cats are getting blamed and poached for hunting livestock. The cats are not always the problem; there are many other predators that could be taking livestock. It is important that we protect these cat species for their important role in the food web. Being able to properly identify the cats that are coming into close contact with humans will increase our knowledge of them.

Background Information

The family Felidae is the family that all cats are found in, even your house cat is found within this family. There are 36 different species in Felidae. All cats share some of the same characteristics such as being excellent hunters. Cats are divided into 2 groups, the big cats (lions and tigers) and small cats (leopards, cheetahs, servals, caracals, etc.) Small cat species are not able to roar. Since felines share so many similar traits it is often difficult to be able to tell them apart. The cheetah, leopard and jaguar get mistaken for each other all the time. Even though these species are found on different continents!

Africa is home to quite a few species of cats; lions, leopards, cheetahs, servals, and caracals just to name a few. During this activity we will also focus on a few species of cats that are not native to Africa. Snow leopards and tigers which are native to Asia, as

well as the jaguar that is native to North and South America. The best way to be able to tell these species apart is by their fur, each species has very different patterns on their fur or no patterns at all. The patterns even differ among individuals of the same species, just like how our fingerprints are unique to us. Some of patterns are spots also known as rosettes that are larger rings encircling smaller spots.

Materials Needed

- Cat Information Sheet
- Guess Which Cat Worksheet
- Pencil or pen

Length of Activity

30 minutes

Procedure

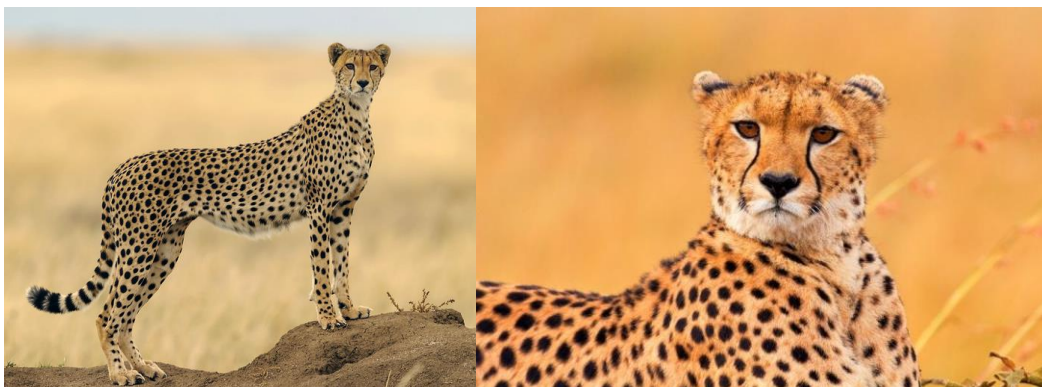
- Using the background information and Cat Information sheet, complete the Guess Which Cat worksheet.
- Check your answers with the answer key.

Cat Information



Lion

Lions are large cats with short, tawny coats, white underparts, and long tails with a black tuft at the end. They are sexually dimorphic (males and females look different in size and color) with male lions being the only cats with manes. Three-year-old male lions grow manes that vary in color from black to blonde. They can weigh 250-500 pounds.



Cheetah

Cheetahs are slim and have long legs in relation to their body size with a small, rounded head and short ears. Their fur is pale yellow, or a fawn color, the spots are a solid black speckle randomly placed throughout the body. The fur is coarse with a small ruff of longer hair on the back of the neck. Their faces are distinctly marked with a black stripe from the front corner of the eye going down the length of the muzzle.



African Leopard

There are 9 subspecies of leopards found in Africa, India, China, and Central Asia. All leopards have short legs relative to their long body. They have a broad head, and their massive skull allows for powerful jaw muscles. The leopard's shoulder has specialized attachment sites for climbing muscles. They have small round ears, long whiskers extending from dark spots on the upper lip. African Leopard's coat ranges from tawny or light yellow in warm, dry habitats to reddish orange in dense forests. Their body is covered with black rosettes that have a solid lighter color in the middle, which are circular in East Africa and square in South Africa. They have solid black spots on their chest, feet, and face and rings on their tail.



Caracal

Caracals have brown to red coats. Females are typically lighter than males. Their undersides are white and have with many small spots. The face has black markings on the whisker pads, around the eyes, above the eyes and faintly down the center of the head and nose. The trademark features of caracals are their elongated and black-tufted ears. They have a short tail that does not reach the ground when standing.



Serval

Servals are slender and agile. Their legs and ears are long and considered the largest in the cat family relative to their size. Servals have a coat with copper shade. They have black spots and stripes, which vary among individuals in size and placement. Individuals that live in grasslands tend to have larger spots than those found in forests. Markings run from the top of the head between the ears and continue down the back breaking into four distinct lines. Upon reaching the shoulders, the lines break and scatter into spots along the same path of the stripes. The tip of the tail is black. The back of the ears is black with a white line between them that look like eyes.



Tiger

Tigers have a reddish-orange coat with vertical black stripes along the back and shoulders that vary in size, length, and spacing. The underside of the legs and belly, chest, throat, and muzzle are white or a lighter color. White is found above the eyes and extends to the cheeks. A white spot is present on the back of each ear. The dark lines above the eyes tend to be symmetrical, but the marks on each side of the face are often asymmetrical. The tail is reddish-orange and ringed with several dark bands.



Jaguar

Jaguars are the largest cats in the Americas, they can weigh between 150-300 pounds. Jaguars are powerfully built, with large, square jaws and prominent cheeks. Jaguars have lean bodies and muscular legs. They are built for power, not speed, although they can run briefly, they hunt by pouncing on unsuspecting prey. The coat colors range from pale yellow to reddish brown, with black rosette-shaped spots with spots on the inside of the rosette shape. These spots within spots are found on the neck, body, and limbs. These rosette shaped spots are spaced farther apart than the leopard's spots.



Snow Leopard

Snow leopards have an extremely long tail that is used specifically for balance in the steep and rocky terrain they inhabit but can also be used to cover their nose during harsh winter weather. In general, the average weight for an adult is 70-100 pounds. There is no pronounced sexual dimorphism in the species. A characteristic of snow leopards is the extremely large size of their paws which are an adaptation for walking on snow. The fur color can range anywhere from light gray to dark gray to cream yellow. The entire body is covered with greyish black spots and rosettes. The rosettes are only found on the body and tail, whereas the solid spots are found on the head, neck and lower legs.

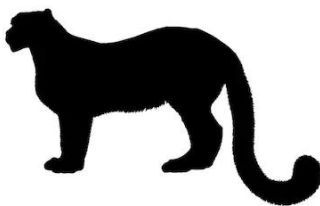
Guess Which Cat

Use the information about each cat to identify each one with only a silhouette and a fur close-up. Write your answer below the pictures.

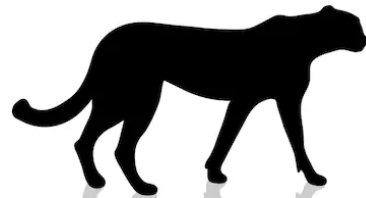
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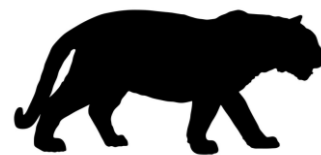
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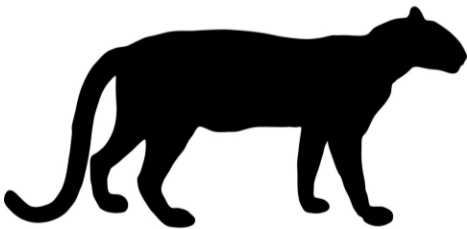
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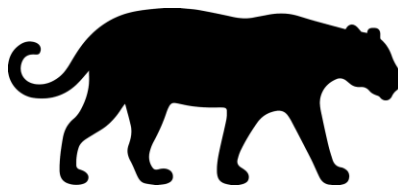
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6.



8.





Answer Key

1. Lion
2. Snow Leopard
3. Cheetah
4. Tiger
5. Caracal
6. African Leopard
7. Serval
8. Jaguar