

BIG CATS

All cats belong to the same family called *Felidae*. Your pet cat at home is related to the lion roaming the African savannah, the tiger camouflaged in the Indian jungle and the jaguar swimming in the Amazon River. Some cats have stripes. Some have spots. These markings help them camouflage in the bush. Even the dusty brown lion is difficult to see in the long grass.



The lion is the mightiest of all cats and is known as the king of the jungle. He has a magnificent mane covering his head, neck and shoulders, like a crown.

Cats are hunters. They are carnivorous, which means they eat meat. A domestic cat will hunt and kill birds and small mammals in your garden while lions, tigers, leopards, cheetahs and jaguars hunt their prey in the wild. They hunt antelope, deer, zebras and wildebeest as well as smaller mammals like reptiles, monkeys, rats, squirrels and porcupines.

Cats have large eyes, excellent hearing, very sharp teeth and strong limbs with sharp claws. This makes them good hunters.



There are 36 species of cats. The biggest cat is the tiger which can weigh as much as 318 kg. It can be as long as 5m. The fastest cat is the cheetah which can run as fast as 130km/h.



Leopards are excellent climbers and live most of their lives in treetops. They drag their prey into the top branches to protect it from other predators.

Strange but true!

Hyenas look like dogs. You would expect the hyena to belong to the dog family. But it actually belongs to the cat family. Their coats can be brown, spotted or striped. They hunt zebras, gazelles and buffaloes. But they also eat the remains of dead animals they find in the savannah. Lions often steal hunted animals from the hyena.



Big cats live in all continents except Australia and Antarctica. Most of the 36 species of wild cats are endangered.

Did you understand what you read?

1. What is the Latin word for cat family?

2. Name five big cats?

3. What makes big cats good hunters?

4. Which is the biggest cat?

5. Which big cat can run at great speed?

6. Which big cat lives mostly in the trees?

7. On which two continents will you NOT find big cats?

8. What word do you use to describe animals being able to hide in the bush or long grass because of their spots, stripes and brown colour of their coats.

9. Are hyenas cats?

10. What do leopards drag into high branches in trees?

11. What two big cats have spots?

12. How many big cat species are there?

13. What animals do hyenas hunt?

14. What do you call animals that hunt?

15. What animal likes to eat the remains of dead animals.