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## PANTHER FACT SHEET



**STATUS:**  
Endangered

**DESCRIPTION:**  
One of 30 cougar subspecies, the Florida panther is tawny brown on the back and pale gray underneath, with white flecks on the head, neck and shoulder.

**SIZE:**  
Males, up to 130 pounds; females, 70 pounds.

**HABITAT:**  
Cypress swamps, pine and hardwood hammock forests.

**RANGE:**  
Originally from western Texas and throughout the southeastern states; now only in Florida.

**FOOD:**  
Mostly white-tailed deer, sometimes wild hog, rabbit, raccoon, armadillo and birds.

**BEHAVIOR:**  
Solitary, territorial, often travel at night. Males have a home range of up to 400 square miles and females about 50-100 square miles. 30-50 individuals.

**OFFSPRING:**  
Reach sexual maturity at about 3 years. Mating season is December through February. Gestation lasts about 90 days and females bear 2-6 kittens. Young stay with mother for about two years. Females do not mate again until young have left.

**THREATS:**  
Habitat loss because of human development, collision with vehicles, parasites, feline distemper, feline calicivirus (an upper respiratory infection), and other diseases. The biggest threat to their survival is human encroachment. Historical persecution reduced this wide-ranging, large carnivore to a small area of south Florida. This created a tiny isolated population that became inbred. The number of living Florida panthers is estimated to be between 80 and 100.

**PROTECTION:**  
\*CITES Appendix I, Endangered Species Act

**CONSERVATION:**  
Reduced speeding zones, construction of panther underpasses, public education, captive breeding programs and research.  
\*Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international treaty with more than 144 member countries. Appendix I listed species cannot be traded commercially. Appendix II listed species can be traded commercially only if it does not harm their survival.

# BLACK PANTHER



The black panther is the common name for a black specimen (a genetic variant) of several species of cats. Zoologically, a panther is the same as a leopard, while the term *Panthera* describes the whole family of big cats. But, in North America, the term panther is also used for puma. In South America it could also mean a jaguar. Elsewhere in the world it refers to leopard (originally individual animals with longer tails were deemed panthers and others were leopards; it is a common misconception that panther means a melanistic individual).

It does not exist as a separate species. The genetic variant is most common in jaguars (*Panthera onca*) where it is due to a dominant gene mutation, and leopards (*Panthera pardus*) where it is due to a recessive gene mutation. Close examination of one of these black

cats will show that the typical markings are still there, and are simply hidden by the surplus of the black pigment melanin. Cats with melanism can coexist with litter mates that do not have this condition. In cats that hunt mainly at night, the condition is not detrimental. White panthers also exist, these being albino or leucistic individuals of the same three species.

It is probable that melanism is a favorable evolutionary mutation with a selective advantage under certain conditions for its possessor, since it is more commonly found in regions of dense forest, where light levels are lower. Melanism can also be linked to beneficial mutations in the immune system.

## Black Jaguar

In jaguars, the mutation is dominant hence black jaguars can produce both black and spotted cubs, but spotted jaguars only produce spotted cubs when bred together. In leopards, the mutation is recessive and some spotted leopards can produce black cubs (if both parents carry the gene in hidden form) while black leopards always breed true when mated together. The black jaguar was considered a separate species by indigenous peoples.

## Black Leopard

These are the most common form of black panther in captivity and have been selectively bred for decades as exhibits or exotic pets (this inhumane inbreeding for the sake of appearance has adversely affected temperament). They are smaller and more lightly built than jaguars. The spotted pattern is still visible on black leopards.

Black leopards are reported from moist densely forested areas in south western China, Burma, Assam and Nepal; from Travancore and other parts of southern India and are said to be common in Java and the southern part of the Malay Peninsula where they may be more numerous than spotted leopards. They are less common in tropical Africa, but have been reported from Ethiopia (formerly Abyssinia), the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares. One was recorded by Peter Turnbull Kemp in the equatorial forest of Cameroon.

Adult black panthers (leopards) are more temperamental (nervous or vicious) than their spotted counterparts. It is a myth that their mothers often reject them at a young age because of their color. In actuality, they are more temperamental because they have been inbred (e.g. brother/sister, father/daughter, mother/son matings) to preserve the coloration. The poor temperament has been bred into the strain as a side effect of inbreeding. It is this poor temperament that leads to problems of maternal care in captivity as the proximity of humans stresses the mother.

## CAPTIVITY:

While zoos and aquariums may appear to be educational and conservation-oriented, most are designed with the needs and desires of the visitors in mind, not the needs of the animals. Many animals in zoos and aquariums exhibit abnormal behavior as a result of being deprived of their natural environments and social structures. Some zoos and aquariums do rescue some animals and work to save endangered species, but most animals in zoos were either captured from the wild or bred in captivity for the purpose of public display, not species protection. The vast majority of captive-bred animals will never be returned to the wild. When the facility breeds too many animals they become "surplus" and often are sold to laboratories, traveling shows, shooting ranches, or to private individuals who may be unqualified to care for them.