

JAGUAR

CARD 23

GROUP 1: MAMMALS

CLASS
Carnivora

ORDER
Felidae

FAMILY
Panthera onca



The jaguar is the subject of many myths and hunters' tales. The largest American wildcat, it is now rare in its natural habitat as the result of being hunted for its attractive fur.

KEY FACTS



SIZES

Length: 44-73 in. Tail 18-30 in.
Weight: Males, 125-250 lb.
Females, 100-200 lb.



BREEDING

Sexual maturity: 3 years.
Mating: Non-seasonal in tropics; early autumn in extremes of range.
Gestation: 93-110 days.
No. of young: 1-4 cubs.



LIFESTYLE

Habit: Solitary, except in breeding season, when they come together to mate.
Diet: Ground-living mammals, domestic stock, fish, frogs, turtles, and small alligators.
Lifespan: Up to 22 years.



RELATED SPECIES

Eight subspecies, also *P. tigris*, *P. leo*, *P. pardus*, and *P. uncia*.



Range of the jaguar.

DISTRIBUTION

Central and South America as far south as Patagonia; the largest jaguars are found in Mato Grosso in Brazil.

CONSERVATION

All subspecies are endangered. Many are extinct except in zoos, where they breed successfully. At present, the greatest threats to the jaguar are overhunting (mostly for its fur) and the loss of its habitat to farming.

FEATURES OF THE JAGUAR & LEOPARD



A jaguar's coat (above).
A leopard's coat (below).

The jaguar's jaw is larger and even more powerful looking than the leopard's jaw.

The leopard's head is smaller and narrower than that of the heavier jaguar.

Although both animals have similar body outlines, the jaguar is more heavily built, with a stocky appearance and sturdier legs.



K. Ansel/Planet Earth Pictures

Jaguars live in a variety of habitats,

from dense jungle and scrubland to reed

thickets and shoreline forests. They will even live in

open country, provided the grass and rocks offer

enough cover for hunting, and a reliable supply

of water is available.

HABITS

Adult jaguars are solitary, seeking each other out only during breeding season, when male and female stay together for a short time to mate. A young jaguar stays with its mother for a few years before leaving to find hunting territories of its own.

The size of a jaguar's territory depends on food availability. In an area where food is plentiful, such as a forest, a jaguar can survive in a circular area of about three miles in diameter. Where food is scarce, it may need to roam over an area of 200 square miles.

DID YOU KNOW?

- One jaguar tagged by a biologist was next seen 500 miles away in a new hunting location.
- The jaguar is the only big cat that does not roar.
- Amazonian Indians tell of jaguars emerging from the forest to play with village children.

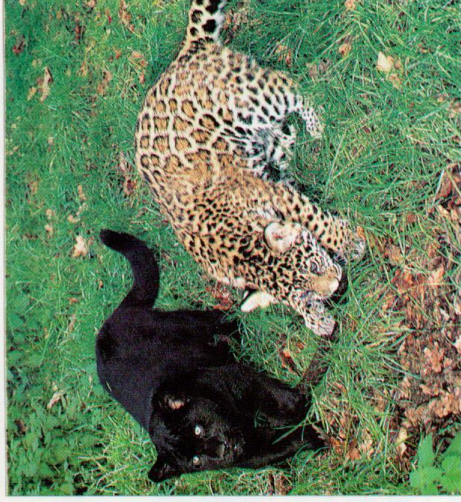
BREEDING

Very little is known about the family life of wild jaguars. They have been hunted almost to extinction for their fur. Biologists now find it difficult to study wild jaguars because they have become so rare. Most information comes from studying captive jaguars in zoos, where the animals have been bred successfully.

Males and females meet in the wild only to mate. The male leaves as soon as mating is over, and the female brings up the young on her own. She gives birth to one to four cubs, which are blind at birth

and weigh only 25-32 ounces. The cubs begin exploring the world outside the den at about two weeks, when their eyes have opened. They begin hunting with their mother at the age of six months. They remain with her for the first two years before leaving to find a territory of their own in which to hunt. A jaguar is sexually mature at three years of age.

Right: All-black jaguars are not uncommon. These cubs have a spotted father and a black mother.

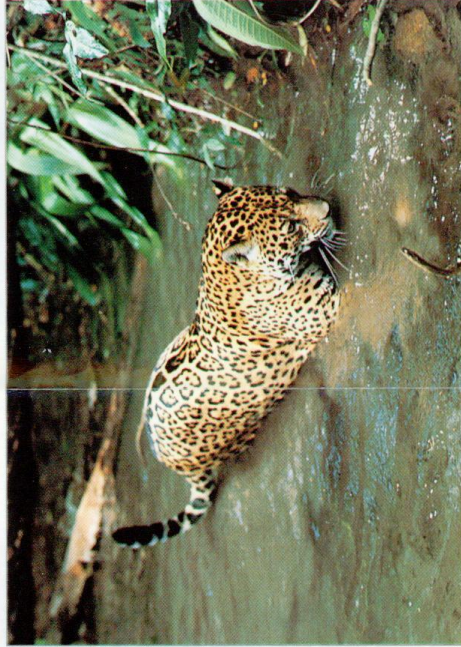


R. Williams/Bruce Coleman

FOOD & HUNTING

Jaguars hunt mainly on the ground; however they will climb trees to lie in wait for prey. The jaguar can cover short distances rapidly, but it tires quickly. It hunts mainly at night and often surprises

its unsuspecting prey. Its food consists mostly of forest animals varying in size from mice to deer. The jaguar is a proficient swimmer and also eats frogs, fish, turtles, and small alligators. It is especially skilled at catching fish, which it does by flipping the fish out onto the riverbank with its paw. Jaguars will also kill domestic animals, particularly where the forest has been cleared for farmland.



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JAGUAR & MAN

Jaguars were once found in an area ranging from Arizona to Argentina, but ruthless hunting has reduced their population. The clearing of forests to build new settlements and pastures for cattle has forced them out of much of their original

habitat. Jaguars are thought to be numerous in the upper basin of the Orinoco, in Venezuela, but everywhere else they are in danger of extinction. There are fewer than 200 wild jaguars left in all of Argentina. Soon, the only remaining populations will live in zoos.

Although jaguars have a reputation as man-eaters, there are numerous stories about men being followed for miles through the forest by solitary jaguars. These stories give credence to the theory that the animals prefer to escort men off their territory rather than attack them.

Left: Within their range, jaguars may occasionally be found in scrubland, although they usually prefer areas with plenty of fresh water. They are excellent swimmers and can supplement their diet with fish, frogs, turtles, and even small alligators.