

Leopard

The leopard (*Panthera pardus*) /'lepərd/ is one of the five "big cats" in the genus *Panthera*. It is a member of the family Felidae with a wide range in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia.[2] Fossil records suggest that in the Late Pleistocene it occurred in Europe and Japan.[3][4]

Compared to other members of Felidae, the leopard has relatively short legs and a long body with a large skull. It is similar in appearance to the jaguar, but has a smaller, lighter physique. Its fur is marked with rosettes similar to those of the jaguar, but the leopard's rosettes are smaller and more densely packed, and do not usually have central spots as the jaguar's do. Both leopards and jaguars that are melanistic are known as black panthers.

The leopard is distinguished by its well-camouflaged fur, opportunistic hunting behaviour, broad diet, and strength (which it uses to move heavy carcasses into trees), as well as its ability to adapt to various habitats ranging from rainforest to steppe, including arid and montane areas, and its ability to run at speeds of up to 58 kilometres per hour (36 mph).[5]

The leopard is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List because leopard populations are threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation, and are declining in large parts of the global range. In Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuwait, Syria, Libya, Tunisia and most likely in Morocco, leopards have already been extirpated.[1] Leopards are hunted illegally, and their body parts are smuggled in the wildlife trade for medicinal practices and decoration.[6][7]

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