Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)

**Conservation Status:** Near Threatened

The leopard is a medium-sized wildcat that is easily distinguished by its beautiful black-spotted coat. Spots are grouped into rosettes on the torso and upper limbs and appear smaller and more scattered on the lower limbs and head. There is large variation in coat color, pattern and body size. The leopard has a long, well-muscled body, thick, short limbs, broad paws, and a long tail. Like other feline species, the leopard has retractable claws.

**Fun Facts:**

1. Leopards are strong swimmers and will sometimes eat fish or crabs.
2. Leopards can hunt from trees. Their spotted coats help them blend in with the leaves until they spring on their prey with a deadly pounce.
3. Leopards are the only large predator found in African rain forests.
4. Relative to its weight, the leopard is the strongest climber among the big cats.

**Habitat**

Leopards are widespread, having the widest habitat tolerance of any Old World cat, found from rainforests to deserts. They are the most successful in woodlands, grassland savanna, and forests, but they exist in other habitats as well. They avoid interiors of large deserts.

**Diet**

Both small and large prey depending on availability. Will turn to livestock and domestic dogs when humans have reduced available prey.

**Predators**

Humans

**Behavior**

Leopards are primarily nocturnal, solitary animals. Each individual has a home range. Male leopards have a larger range than females, overlapping with the ranges of several females. To mark their range, leopards will use urine and claw marks.They are very strong climbers that use their retractable claws and long tail to help them climb and balance. Leopards spend much of their time in trees. In some cases, leopards will even hunt from trees using the leaves as camouflage. Even when they don’t hunt from trees, they will often drag their kill into a tree to prevent lions and hyenas from taking it.

**Breeding**

After a gestation period of between 90 and 105 days, females have a litter of one to four cubs. Breeding happens year-round, but births tend to peak during the rainy season. Leopard cubs are extremely vulnerable, so mothers keep them hidden in dense vegetation until about six to eight weeks of age. They are weaned at around three months but will remain with their mother until she is ready to mate again.

**Size**

Length: 1-1.25 m

Height: 58-70 cm

**Weight**

28-65 kg

**Life Span:** Up to 21 years

**Gestation Period:** 90-105 days

**Average number of offspring:** 1-4