

For Creative Minds

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Florida Panther Fun Facts

Panther, cougar, mountain lion, and puma are all names for the same type of animal from the feline family. They are related to pet cats, as well as to tigers, cheetahs, jaguars, and bobcats. They even purr like other small cats!

Like pet cats, Florida panthers have sharp claws that can be in or out (retractable). They use these claws to grab their prey: deer, wild hogs, raccoons, rabbits, and armadillos.

If they catch a large meal, they may eat it over several days. If so, they will frequently cover it with leaves and sticks to keep it fresh and hidden from other scavengers.

Their scientific genus name, *concolor*, means "one color." That's because their fur is all one color—similar to deer, their favorite prey. Their chests are a little lighter in color.

Adult Florida panthers live by themselves and are very territorial. Each adult may use up to 200 square miles for his/her own territory. A male panther's home range overlaps with the smaller home ranges of several females.

Their habitats include both dry and wet land: cypress forests, swamps, freshwater marshes, hardwood hammocks, and woods. They prefer areas with lots of cover and lots of prey (food).

Florida Panther Life Cycle

Panthers can mate throughout the year, but most young are born in May and June.

A female usually mates for the first time when she is two years old. She will leave urine scents to let males know when she is ready. She may be heard screaming, probably because she is uncomfortable.

She will be pregnant with her kittens for about three months during which time she'll select a den in a well protected spot, usually in dense saw palmetto thickets.

The kittens are born with blue eyes and spots that help them hide while in the den. They drink their mothers' milk until they are about two months old and then they start to follow their mother out of the den (unless she is hunting).

By the time the kittens are six months old, their eyes have turned brown and their spots have faded.

At nine months, they are hunting small animals by themselves.

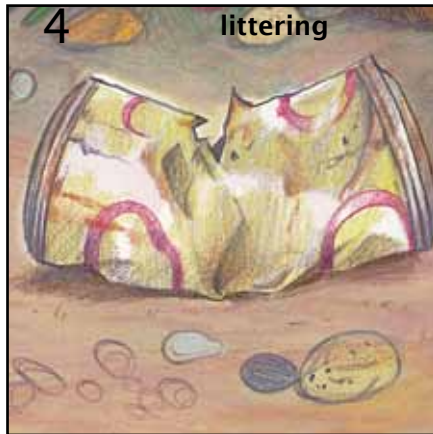
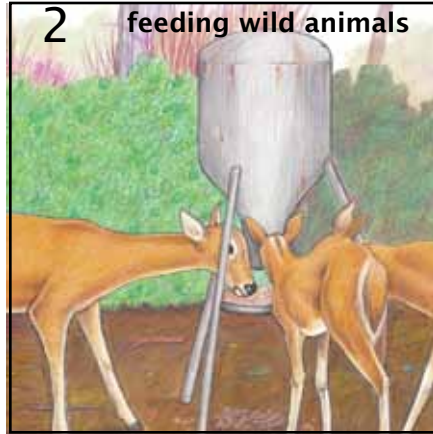
When they are about a year and a half, they will leave their mother and find their own territory.

Florida panthers may live to be about 12 years old, if they are lucky.

Endangered and Threatened Animals

- Threatened:** A species in trouble—it may become endangered if people don't help out.
Endangered: A species in a lot of trouble—it may become extinct if people don't help out.
Extinct: A species we'll never see again—extinction is forever.

The animals Felina “talks to” in this book are either endangered or threatened. Decide if the pictures shown below represent things that hurt or help animals. Answers are upside down at the bottom of the page.



1. Rehabilitation programs are designed to **help** injured animals and to hopefully return them to the wild. Sometimes injured animals cannot survive on their own, even after rehabilitation. Those animals are often sent to zoos and aquariums where they live safely.
2. Feeding wild animals can **hurt** them. Not only do they stop getting their own food, but people food can make them sick. And, because they are used to human food, they may wander into inhabited areas where they can get hurt by people or they might hurt people. Growing native plants and feeding songbirds seeds and grains that they would normally eat can **help** them. Feeding birds bread or other people food **hurts** them.
3. Busy roads going through wild animals' habitats can **hurt** the animals. They might get hit by cars or they may be unable to reach feeding or nesting areas. People have built wildlife underpasses in some areas so that wild animals can safely cross under the road.
4. Littering **hurts** animals. Some animals cut themselves on trash or can get trapped in garbage. Sometimes they eat trash (like plastic bags or balloons) thinking that it's food, and it can make them sick or even kill them.
5. Wildlife refuges **help** by providing a safe place for wild animals to live.

Match the Animal Information

Match the animal to its description, animal class and what it eats. Answers are upside down on the next page. If a baby animal drinks milk from its mother, breathes oxygen from the air through lungs, and has hair or fur at some point in its life, it is a mammal. If an animal has feathers, it is a bird. Birds breathe oxygen from the air and hatch from eggs. If an animal breathes oxygen from the air and has scales, it is a reptile. Most reptiles hatch from eggs. All of the animals mentioned in this book have lungs to breathe oxygen from the air.

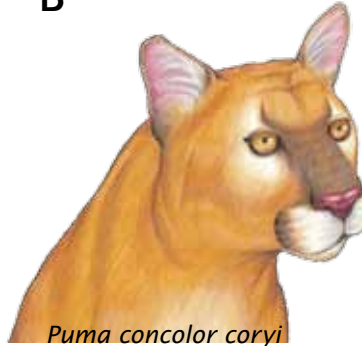
Animals that only eat meat (other animals) are called carnivores. Animals that only eat plants are called herbivores. Animals that eat both plants and meat are called omnivores.

A Gopher tortoise



Gopherus polyphemus

B Florida panther



Puma concolor coryi

C Red-cockaded Woodpeckers



Picoides borealis

1 There are fewer than 100 of these animals left in the wild. North American Cougars roam the western half of the US and Canada and most of Central and South America. Separated from the cougars, this sub-species are the only cougars found east of the Mississippi and are isolated in the very southern part of Florida due to hunting and habitat loss. Several animals are hit by cars as they try to cross busy roads. People have built wildlife underpasses to help them safely cross roads. Kittens are born with spotted fur and nurse from their mothers. Like all cats, they hunt other animals for their food.

2 Their feathers are black and white but adult males have a little red spot on their heads, called a cockade. A family will peck a pine tree, usually a longleaf pine that has a fungus disease, making it easier to peck the wood. Unfortunately, the fungus needs old trees, and most of the trees were cut down by the early European settlers for farming or ship masts. It takes 100 to 150 years for new trees to grow, and seeds sprout only after a fire. Until recently, people put out the fires, making it difficult for the seedlings to sprout and grow. The animals peck holes around the nest that drip sap so that rat snakes can't reach the hatchlings. Males tend to stay with their families but females leave to start their own families. These animals eat insects, bugs, fruit and seeds.

3 These animals live in a variety of dry habitats with loose, dry, and sandy soil. Using their clawed, shovel-like front feet, they dig burrows averaging 4.5 meters (14.8 feet) in length and 2 meters (6.6 feet) in depth. This type of turtle is also called an "apex species," because many other animals or plants in their ecosystem depend on them to survive. Over 300 different types of animals rely on the turtle's burrow for their home—either while the animal lives there or after it is abandoned. Females lay eggs in the late spring to early summer and the hatchlings will spend the following winter in or around the mother's burrow. These animals eat low-growing grasses, legumes, and fruit.

Manatee

D



Trichechus manatus

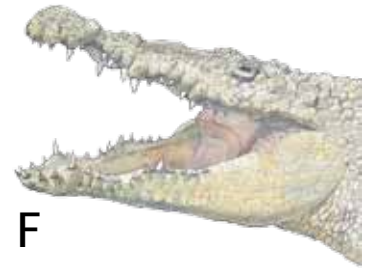
E

Wood stork



Mycteria americana

American crocodile



F

Crocodylus acutus

4 Adults stand an average of just over 3 feet (1 m) tall and have a wingspan of just under 5 feet (1.5 m). They have white feathers with black tips, very long legs for standing in the marshy water where they live, and a long, sharp bill. Their unusual hunting behavior is called grope-feeding. They keep their open bills in the water and wait for fish to swim in. As soon as they sense movement, they clamp their bill on the fish and enjoy a tasty meal. A male and female pair build their nest high in a tree that is close to water. The female will usually lay two to five eggs. Both parents will incubate the eggs for about a month. After the chicks are born, the parents feed them with fish they eat and then throw up. Chicks learn to fly when they are about nine weeks old.

5 These animals were overhunted for their tough, scaly backs and smooth belly skin used to make pocketbooks and shoes. The main danger to these animals today is habitat loss and being hit by cars if crossing roads. They live primarily in coastal mangrove swamps, but may also be found in inland ponds and canals. A female will build a nest out of loose dirt at the water's edge and will lay 20-50 eggs in April or May. She will guard them closely until they hatch in July or August and will carry them to the water, after which they survive on their own (instinct). They eat fish and other water-living animals as well as some birds, reptiles, and small mammals.

6 It is said that ancient sailors thought these animals were mermaids. Even though these large animals live in the ocean and coastal rivers and canals, they breathe air through lungs, just like we do, coming to the surface for oxygen every few minutes. These slow-moving creatures can be up to 12 feet (3.66 meters) long! A female may have a calf every two to five years. Calves nurse from their mothers for a long time, up to two years. Sometimes these animals are hurt and killed by very cold weather, pollution, habitat loss and people in boats not watching for them or not obeying posted boat speed warnings. Feeding them may put them at greater risk of harm by causing them to lose fear of humans. Often called "sea cows," these animals spend much of their time grazing underwater plants.

- Match the Animals Answers: 1B, 2C, 3A, 4E, 5F, 6D
- Mammals: Florida panther, Manatee
 - Birds: Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Wood stork
 - Reptiles: Gopher tortoise, American crocodile
 - Carnivores: Florida panther, American crocodile,
 - Wood stork
 - Herbivores: Gopher tortoise, Manatee
 - Omnivores: Red-cockaded Woodpecker
- What they eat