

Tiger



Bobcat



Lion

Penguin Random House

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Russian blue



Early Greek gold necklace plate



Puma

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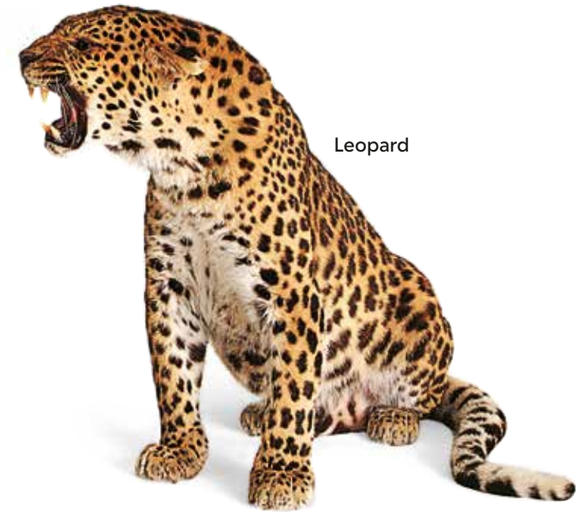
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Good and evil
In Christian communities, cats have always represented both good and evil. Here, good and bad cat spirits fight over the soul of a cat woman.

What is a cat?

Cats are possibly the most beautiful and graceful of all animals. They have fine fur, which is often strikingly marked with spots or stripes (p. 14), and elegant heads with pointed ears and large eyes. Wild and domestic cats all belong to one family, the Felidae. Cats have all the typical features of mammals: they are warm-blooded, have a protective skeleton, and produce milk to feed their young. All cats are carnivores, or meat eaters, and they almost all live and hunt on their own. Exceptions include lions, cheetahs, and certain domestic cats, which hunt in a family group, or pride. Affectionate, intelligent, and playful, the domestic cat is one of the most popular of all animal companions.



Lindisfarne Gospels
The beautiful Lindisfarne Gospels – an illuminated copy of the four gospels – were written and decorated in Britain in around 700 CE. Domestic cats were clearly familiar animals at this time.

Now you see me...
This jaguar is well hidden. The striped and spotted fur of the cat family provides very effective camouflage in forests, jungles, grasslands, and plains.



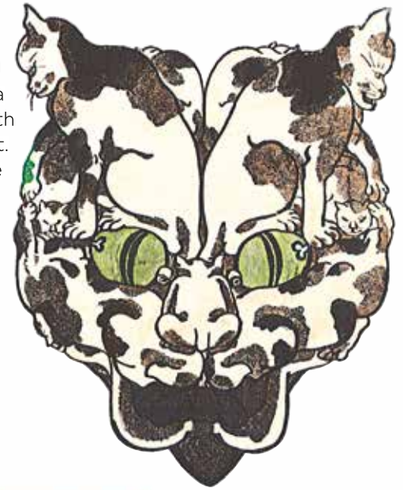


The stripes and markings of this domestic cat are inherited from its wild ancestor.

Whiskers are organs of touch and help all cats – big, small, wild, or domestic – to feel objects in the dark.

Adaptation
Domestic cats are very adaptable. They are found all over the world, from tropical Africa to icy Greenland. The domestic cat is the only member of the cat family that lives and breeds happily within human society.

Cats in Japan
The Japanese have a definite sympathy with the mysterious cat. In art, they have often shown its changeable nature by portraying one cat made up of many others.



All cats have claws and all except the cheetah sheathe them when at rest (pp. 42–43).

The mane of the adult male lion is the only obvious sign of sexual difference in the whole cat family.

Cooperative cats
Lions live and hunt with other members of their pride. Like all cats, lions kill their prey by stalking their victim, then leaping on it and biting into its neck (pp. 28–29).

The first **cats**

Millions of years ago, many cat-like animals roamed the Earth, some more massive and fierce than any alive today. The earliest fossil ancestors of the cat family come from the Eocene period, some 50 million years ago. These evolved into the species of large and small cats that are living today. There were also the now-extinct, sabre-toothed cats named after their enlarged, dagger-like canine teeth. The best known is the American species *Smilodon*.



Stuck on you

In the Ice Age, an eruption of black, sticky tar at Rancho La Brea, now part of modern Los Angeles, USA, trapped thousands of animals, including 2,000 sabre-toothed *Smilodon*.

Smilodon

This large, sabre-toothed cat lived on open grasslands in family groups and preyed on large herd animals. *Smilodon* became extinct about 14,000 years ago.



Reconstruction of *Smilodon* – nobody knows its true colour



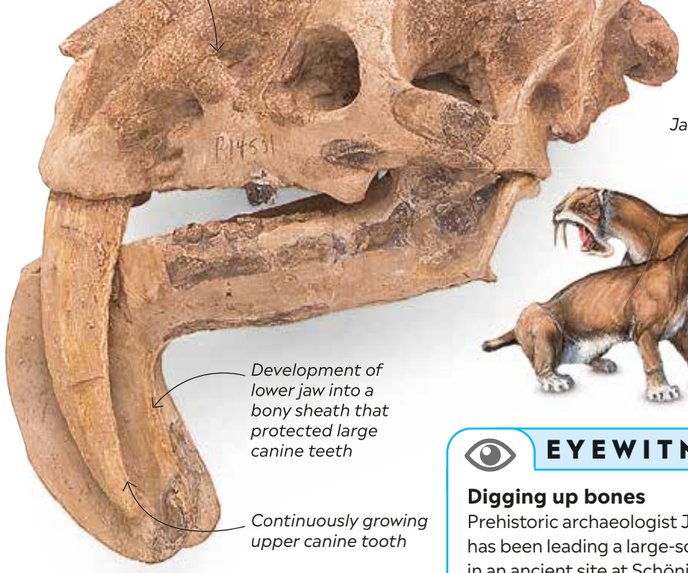
Dinictis

Rather like *Hoplophoneus* (below) but smaller, *Dinictis* was probably a grassland predator. *Dinictis* fossils have now been found across the USA and Canada. Their teeth were shorter than the sabre-toothed cats, but stronger.



Hoplophoneus

Though not classified as a cat, *Hoplophoneus* did have a similar appearance. It lived in North America 35 million years ago and was only distantly related to *Smilodon*, but it had similar large, canine teeth for stabbing prey. *Hoplophoneus* and *Dinictis* are called false sabre-toothed cats.



Artist's impression of *Thylacosmilus*

Thylacosmilus

Thylacosmilus looked like a sabre-toothed cat, but was not part of the cat family. It was a mammal that lived in South America during the Pliocene era about five million years ago.

EYEWITNESS

Digging up bones

Prehistoric archaeologist Jordi Serangeli has been leading a large-scale excavation in an ancient site at Schöningen, Germany. He discovered several fossils of sabre-toothed cats, including the rare European species *Homotherium latidens*. Here, he is seen holding a fossilized bone of a 300,000-year-old sabre-toothed tiger.



The stabber

Smilodon's sabre-teeth extended well below the lower jaw, so the animal could use them without opening its mouth wide. The teeth were used like daggers to stab prey. All the sabre-tooths had slightly weaker lower jaws, but the muscles used to bring the head down could exert a powerful force that was essential for stabbing huge, slow-moving animals.



Cat **clans**

Cats kill other animals for food and so belong to the order Carnivora (flesh eaters). Wildcats are comprised of two species – the European wildcat, *Felis silvestris*, and the African wildcat, *Felis lybica*. The domestic cat, *Felis catus*, is descended from the African wildcat. Members of the two wildcat species can be found throughout much of the world, including Scotland, Germany, Turkey, Africa, central Asia, the Middle East, and China. Cats have well-developed senses, fast movements, and very sharp teeth. Unlike the large cats, the small cats are unable to roar.



Tiger
The tiger is the largest and heaviest of all the cats. It is a night hunter, and preys on animals smaller than itself. Tigers are found from tropical India to icy Siberia.

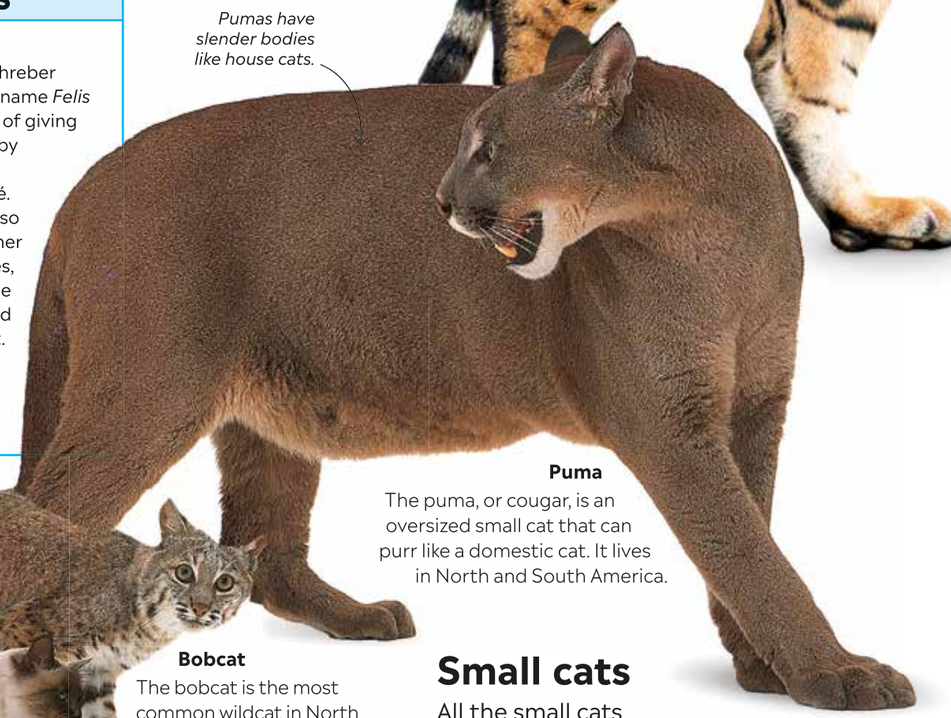
Big cats

The big cats need a great deal of meat to survive. This means they have always been fewer in number than the small cats, who are more able to find enough food for their needs.

EYEWITNESS

Naming cats
German naturalist Johann von Schreber (1739–1810) coined the scientific name *Felis silvestris*. He followed the system of giving Latin names to species, invented by Swedish botanist Carl von Linné. Schreber also named other cat species, such as the caracal and jungle cat.





Puma
The puma, or cougar, is an oversized small cat that can purr like a domestic cat. It lives in North and South America.



Bobcat
The bobcat is the most common wildcat in North America. It looks rather like a lynx without the long ear tufts.

Domestic cat
There are almost as many breeds of domestic cats as there are of dogs.

Small cats

All the small cats (including the smaller wildcats) live on their own and hunt by night. They are found all over the world, and, tragically, many have been hunted almost to extinction for their beautifully patterned, soft furs.

Odd cats out

The clouded leopard does not roar like the other big cats, nor does it groom or rest like a small cat. The cheetah is unique because it is a running cat (pp. 42–43), whereas all others are leaping cats.

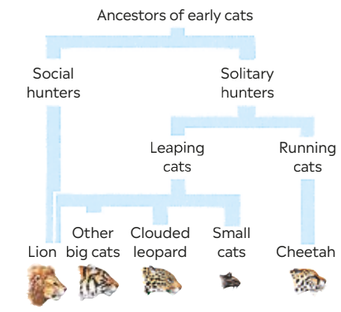


Clouded leopard
The clouded leopard lives in the forests of Southeast Asia, but it is rarely seen and is in danger of extinction.



Cheetah
Cheetahs do not have sheaths over their claws and can run at great speed. This has helped them to adapt to life on the grasslands of Africa where many animals compete for food.

THE DESCENT OF THE CAT



In this diagram, the cheetah is separated from all the other cats because it is the only one able to chase its prey at great speed. However, like other cats, it still kills its prey by leaping on it and biting its neck. All other cats are called leaping cats, because they slowly stalk their prey and then leap on it.