



THE FLORIDA PANTHER

An Endangered Wild Cat

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<http://images.fineartamerica.com/images-medium-large/florida-panther-endangered-andrea-oconnell.jpg>

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Introduction

You are walking through the Florida Everglades, and you think you see a cat-like creature dart from tree to tree, about fifty yards away. You stop in your tracks, not wanting to make any sudden movements. Then suddenly, a big cat jumps onto a large boulder about forty yards away. Its tail is long and fluffy. It stares into your eyes with its strong, brave green eyes. You back away slowly, inch by inch, until you are safely to your car. That amazing animal is an extremely endangered Florida panther. They are hunted for their pelts, sometimes to protect livestock, and also just for sport. If this unfair, selfish behavior doesn't stop soon, it could easily be too late.



Names

The Florida panther's scientific name is *Puma concolor coryi*. It means cat

of the color. Some related species are pumas, mountain lions, and other panthers. Florida

panthers are often mistaken with their relatives. Their fur can be very similar colors to other big cats, and their face is very similar, too. As you can see, it's easy to mistake Florida panthers for other big cats!



Mountain lion

http://www.sfexaminer.com/files/blog_images/mountainlion.jpg

See the resemblance?



Florida panther

http://www.sfexaminer.com/files/blog_images/mountainlion.jpg

Description



<http://mitigationmarketing.com/images/panther.jpg>



A Florida panther kitten still with spots.

<http://infactcollaborative.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Panther-facts-florida-panther.jpg>

From kitten to adult, the Florida panther's size and appearance changes a lot, just like us humans. Kittens are born with spots to help them camouflage from predators, but the spots fade away after about eight months. Most adult Florida panthers weigh between seventy and seventy-five pounds, sometimes depending on where they live and the source of food around them. The Florida panther's tail is usually about two to three feet long. It helps them with balance. Their fur can be light brown, or tan colored. Their fur is usually lighter on their muzzle and chest area. Florida panthers don't roar like other big cats, they scream. They also hiss and purr like domestic cats, and they can even chirp and whistle! Isn't it cool all the amazing traits Florida panthers have from kitten hood to adulthood?

Habitat

Florida Panthers are VERY territorial. They generally have a territory of one hundred to one hundred twenty square miles. Each Florida panther (and it's babies) has its own territory, called their home range. Each female has a home range of about 300 square kilometers, while each male has a home range of about



550 square kilometers. Each female hasThey live in forests, and usually on the edge of wetlands and swamps in the Florida Everglades. Florida panthers used to roam through Tennessee and Texas. Clearly, Florida panthers have a very large range.

<http://gailshumway.com/gallery/plog-content/images/my-collection/mammals/florida-panther-sharp.jpg>

Diet and Hunting

Florida panthers eat many different animals, and have smart techniques to help them get easy meals! Some of the things that they eat are rabbits, armadillos, birds, and even porcupines! Their main food source is white-tailed deer. In order to eat the porcupines without being pricked, they attack and go for the soft belly with no quills, and they eat from there. Florida panthers don't usually attack livestock, but occasionally it happens, and for some hundred years people have believed that it is their main source of food. Florida panthers often kill the slowest, weakest, or sickest animals in the herd because they are the easiest to kill. Even so, they can kill animals much stronger and larger than themselves! As you can see, the Florida panther is a strong, brave, and smart big cat!



White tailed deer, the Florida panther's main prey.
http://www.statesymbolsusa.org/IMAGES/Pennsylvania/white_tailed_deer_buck2.jpg

Mating Habits

Florida panthers are ready to have kittens when they reach maturity at around two to three years old. A female is pregnant for about ninety days. Their litter size is usually one to four kittens. When born, kittens weigh four to eight ounces. Male Florida panthers often fight over females to mate with! Whoever wins the fight, wins the female. The male leaves after mating, and even the mother considers the father as a threat to her kittens. Kittens can be born at any time of the year, but mostly in late winter or early spring.



<http://www.hdw-inc.com/flapantherkitten.jpg>

Life Cycle

Florida panthers can live from eight to fifteen years in the wild, and ten to twenty years in captivity. Females are ready to mate at two to three years old. When the female is ready to mate, it leaves scent markings for the male to find. Florida panther gestation is about three months. When they are born, they always have blue eyes, and open them at about two to three weeks. The mother is the only one who takes care of the kittens, never meet their father. As the kittens get older, their fur darkens slightly. Clearly, the relationship between the father cougar and his young is not very strong at all, unlike the strong bond between the kittens and the mother.



<http://news.ifas.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Panther-in-tree-big.jpg>



Florida panther furs.

<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/science-stories/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/panthers01.jpg>

Threats

The Florida panther's main threat is people. People kill them for fur, and even just for sport! In Florida, there used to be over two thousand of them. Now, only thirty to fifty remain. There is only about one hundred left in the wild. This is important because obviously people need to think less about themselves, and more about the wildlife around them!



Poached Florida panther.

http://www.tampabay.com/multimedia/archive/00071/B4_S_panther061109_71783c.jpg

Solutions

There are many good ways to help Florida panthers. One helpful thing to do to help the population keep increasing is to donate money to wildlife and endangered species associations. Also, planting trees where their habitat has been destroyed is a very helpful favor for the Florida panthers! Wildlife workers have been giving them medicine to help them fight off diseases and to help them stay healthy. Thankfully, there are good ways to help Florida panthers.

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