



Animal Tracks

FALL 2026

VOLUME 3 | ISSUE 2

ELLEN TROUT ZOO | LUFKIN, TEXAS

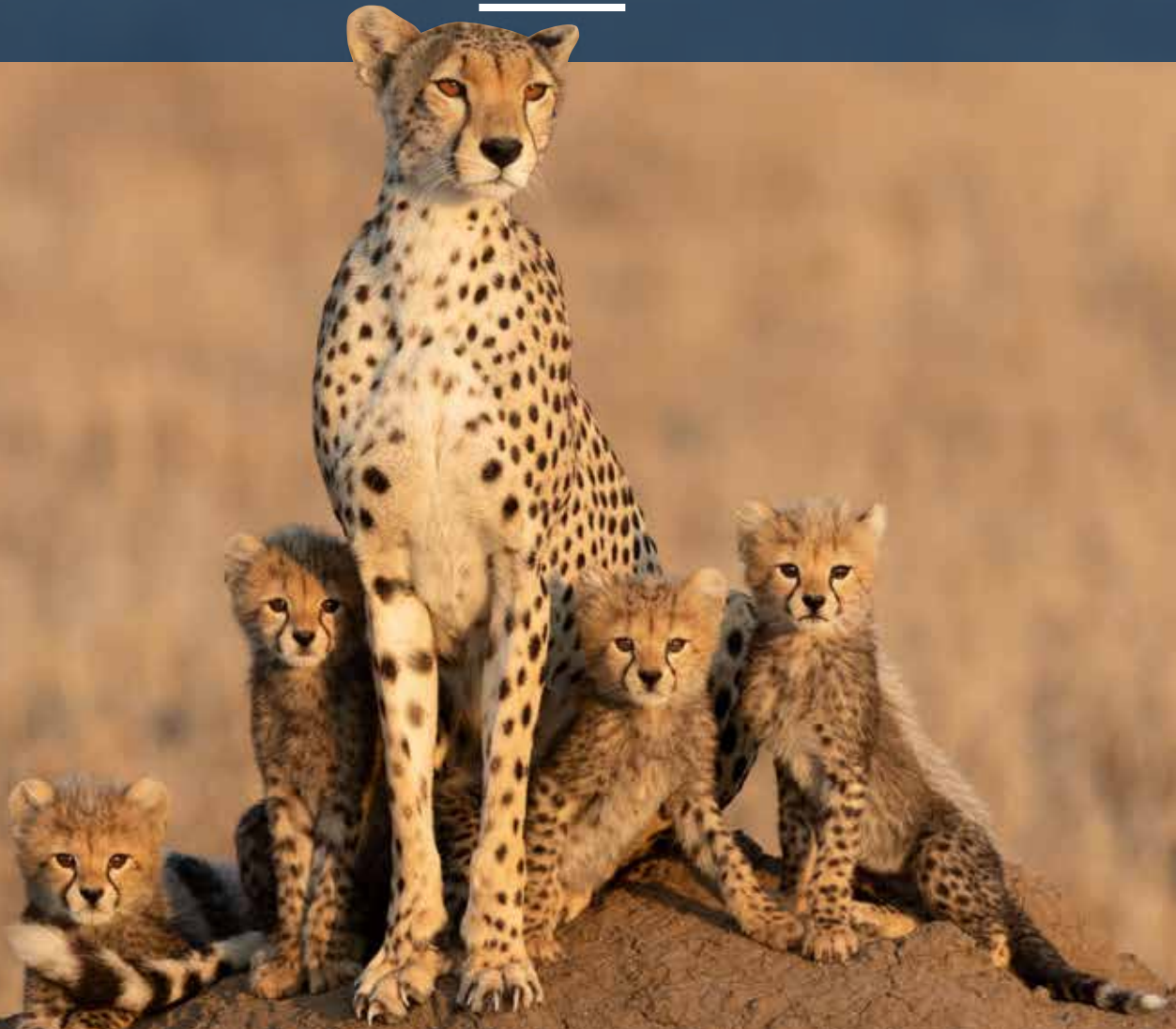
*Ocelots
in Texas*

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WHAT'S NEW AT THE ZOO?

A Step Closer to Accreditation

In early June inspectors from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums arrived and conducted an inspection of the zoo as we work towards achieving accreditation. They spent three days on grounds touring the zoo grounds and animal habitats. They interviewed zoo staff, city administration and FOETZ board members. When the inspection was completed, we were presented with a list of achievements and a list of areas where they felt we could continue to improve. I should point out that they were particularly impressed with the staff's passion for what they do and their dedication to making the zoo a better place. They were also impressed with our "dynamic education programs" and how this is a point of pride for the zoo. They noted that the Louisiana pine snake reproduction and release program was significant for the zoo and the community. In September we will find out if we have made enough progress to qualify for accreditation.

Wilds of Africa Moves Forward

The Wilds of Africa project continues to move forward. We have identified a general contractor and are working through the details of an agreement and hope to proceed with construction in the near future.

New Habitats Taking Shape

Construction is well underway on a new outdoor home for Komodo dragons and a new home for the zoo's otter. Exhibit walls have been built, and the front viewing plaza is now complete. We have not identified dates for opening these new habitats, but we hope they will be completed before the end of September.



They were particularly impressed with the staff's passion for what they do and their dedication to making the zoo a better place.

Introducing Wild Lights

Lastly, I can announce that the zoo will be hosting a new winter event called "Wild Lights". This exciting new event will take place from mid-November through the end of the year. This immersive illuminated experience will turn the zoo into an unforgettable seasonal destination. There will be larger than life lighted animals, lighted tunnels, an ornamented garden walk-through, lighted trees and a "butterfly garden". We are in the process of working out some of the details and you will hear more about this in the coming months.

Thank you for your continued support and we'll see you at the zoo.

Ryan

Executive Director



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fall 2025

SEPTEMBER

19 Raiders of the Lost Zoo, 10AM - 4PM

OCTOBER

16 Zoo Boo, 6 - 8PM

17 Zoo Boo, 6 - 8PM

NOVEMBER

19 Wild Lights Opens

26 Thanksgiving, CLOSED



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1
INTERNATIONAL
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5
INTERNATIONAL
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AWARENESS DAY

SEPTEMBER



8
NATIONAL
IGUANA DAY

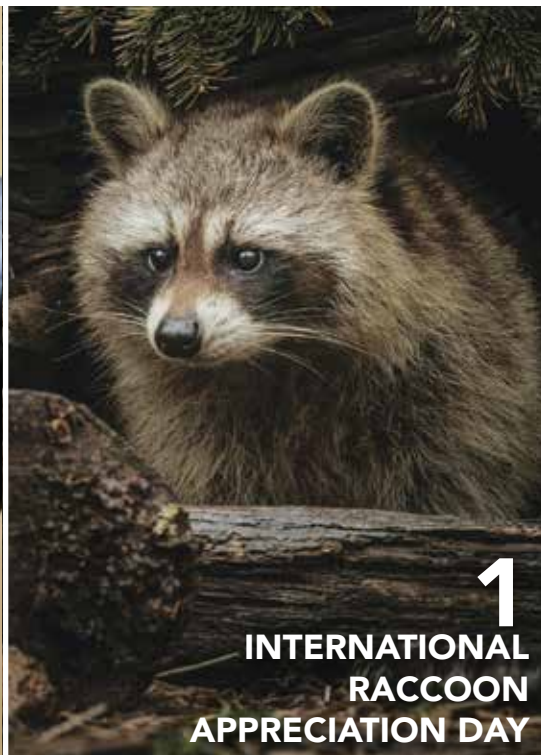


22
WORLD
RHINO DAY

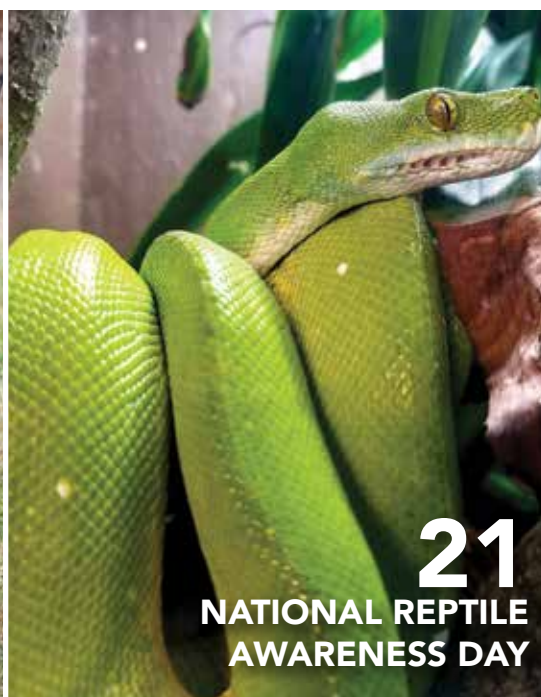


26
WORLD
CASSOWARY DAY

CONSERVATION DAYS



OCTOBER





7
NATIONAL
BISON DAY



19
WORLD
ANTEATER DAY



29
INTERNATIONAL
JAGUAR DAY

NOVEMBER



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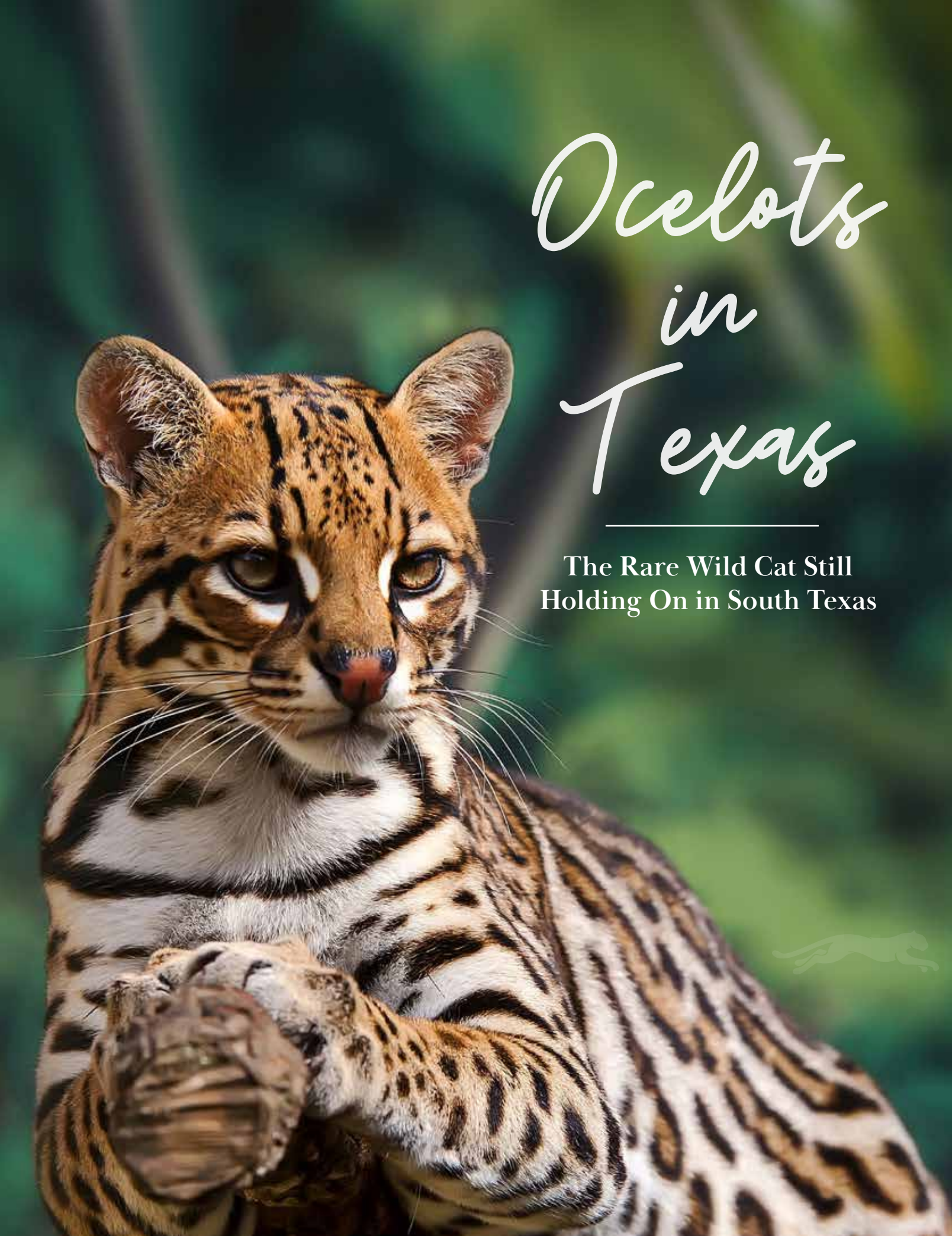
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Ocelots in Texas

The Rare Wild Cat Still
Holding On in South Texas



Ocelots are beautiful, elusive, and unmistakably wild. They are also Texans.

With golden fur, dark markings, and large, watchful eyes, the ocelot looks like an animal from somewhere far away. But this spotted wild cat is part of Texas wildlife. Ocelots once ranged much more widely, but today they are among the rarest wild cats in the United States. In Texas, they survive only in deep South Texas, where dense native thornscrub gives them the cover they need to hunt, rest, and raise young. They are secretive, mostly nocturnal, and rarely seen by people. But even if most Texans never spot one in the wild, ocelots remain an important part of the state's natural heritage.

Ocelots are small wild cats, larger than a house cat but much smaller than a mountain lion. Their coats are covered in dark spots, stripes, and chain-like markings that help them blend into dense vegetation. In South Texas, ocelots depend on thick thornscrub habitat. Plants such as spiny hackberry, lotebush, and blackbrush create the brushy cover these cats need. In that hidden world of leaves, branches, and shadow, an ocelot's patterned coat can nearly disappear. Ocelots hunt small animals such as rodents, rabbits, birds, reptiles, and other prey. Like many cats, they rely on stealth and patience, moving quietly through cover before striking.

The biggest challenge for Texas ocelots is habitat loss. Much of the native brush they need has been cleared for agriculture, roads, cities, and other development. As that habitat disappeared, ocelot populations became smaller and more isolated. Fragmented habitat is especially dangerous. When good brushland is separated by roads or open spaces, ocelots may have to travel farther to find food, mates, or new territory. That movement can put them at risk. Vehicle strikes are one of the most serious threats. Every loss matters when the

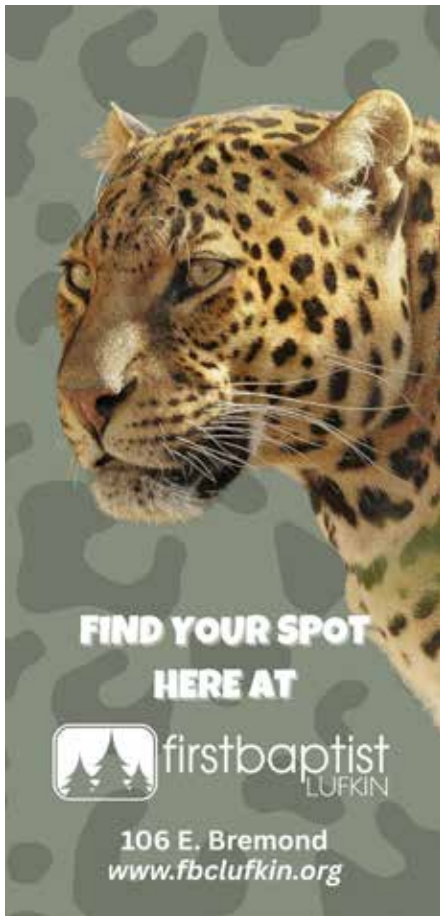
population is so small.

The ocelot is federally listed as endangered in the United States. Today, only about 100 ocelots are believed to remain in the wild in this country, all in deep South Texas. Biologists recognize two small breeding populations: one centered around Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and another on private ranchlands. Because these groups are small and separated, conservationists are working to protect habitat, restore native brush, and create safer connections between habitat patches. Wildlife crossings and fencing can help guide ocelots under roads instead of across traffic.

Ocelot conservation depends on partnerships. Wildlife refuges, researchers, private landowners, transportation planners, and conservation organizations all play a role. Protected areas such as Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge provide important habitat, while private ranchlands also offer space for ocelots to survive and reproduce. Restoring thornscrub takes time, but every protected acre, restored corridor, and safer road crossing can help.

The ocelot's story is not only about one rare animal. It is also about the land that supports it. South Texas thornscrub may not look dramatic at first glance, but it is full of life. Birds, reptiles, insects, mammals, and native plants all depend on this habitat. Protecting ocelots also helps protect the wild brushlands that shelter many other species.

Ocelots are beautiful, elusive, and unmistakably wild. They are also Texans. Their future depends on whether enough habitat remains connected, protected, and safe. With continued conservation, this rare spotted cat may keep slipping through the shadows of South Texas for generations to come.



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EYES OF THE NIGHT

When the sun goes down, cats have a clear advantage.

Whether it is a lion moving through the grass, a bobcat slipping between trees or a house cat watching the hallway after dark, felines are built to see in low light. Their eyes cannot see in complete darkness, but they need far less light than humans do.

One reason is the tapetum lucidum, a reflective layer behind the retina. Light that passes through the eye is reflected back across the retina, giving the light-sensitive cells a second chance to detect it. It is also what causes a cat's eyes to appear to glow when headlights, a flashlight or a camera flash hit them at night.

Cats also have large pupils that can open wide to let in as much light as possible. Many smaller cats have vertical, slit-shaped pupils, while larger cats such as lions and

tigers have round pupils. Pupil shape is tied partly to how an animal hunts and how close it tends to be to its prey.

Their vision is especially good at detecting movement. A small flick in the grass or a quick shift in the shadows can be far easier for a cat to notice than it would be for us. That ability is important for predators that often hunt around dawn, dusk or after dark.

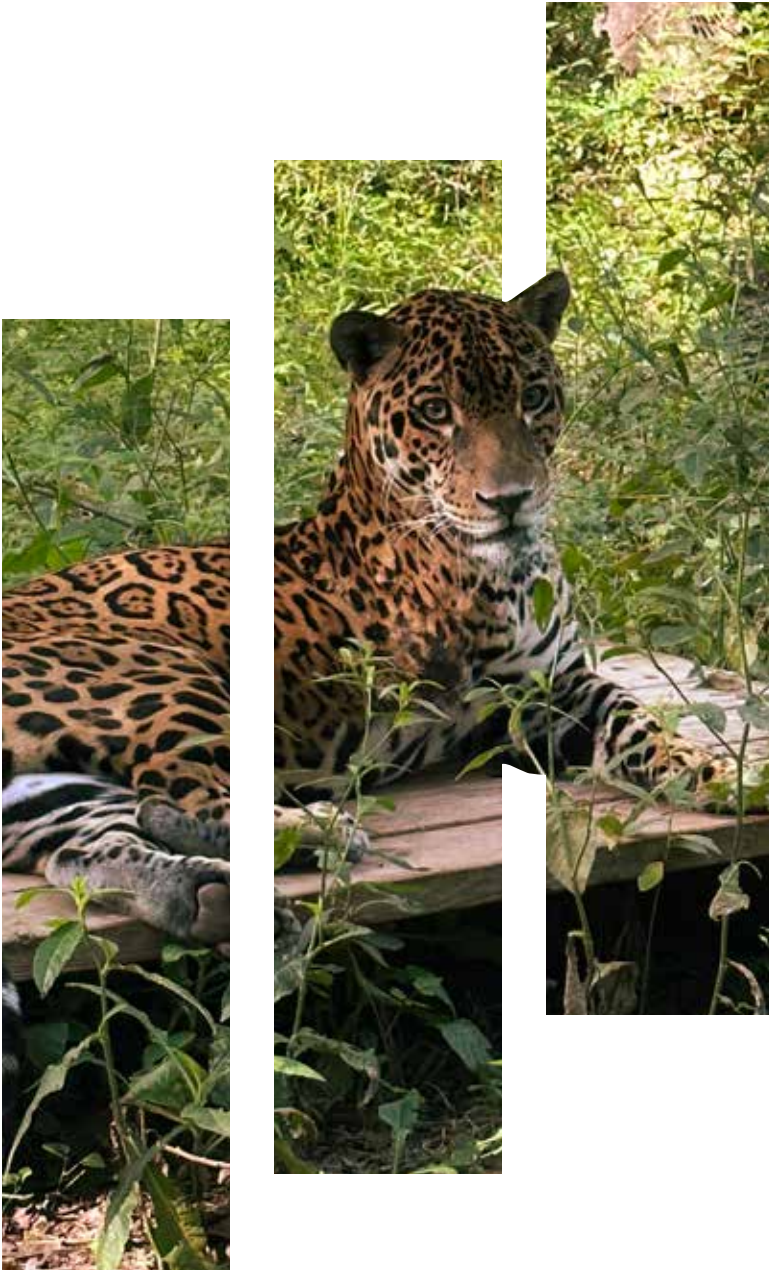
But feline eyesight has trade-offs. Cats do not see the same range of colors humans do, and their daytime vision is not as sharp as ours. Instead, their eyes are designed to excel where it matters most: spotting movement, judging distance and making the most of limited light.

So, while the nighttime world may look dim to us, for a cat it is full of motion, contrast and opportunity.

CAT CALL

MEET THE FELINES OF ELLEN TROUT ZOO

Seven cats. Five species. Seven very different personalities. From lions and a tiger to jaguars, clouded leopards and a bobcat, the felines of Ellen Trout Zoo each have their own stories, quirks and favorite things. Meet the individuals behind the whiskers and learn a few things you may not know about the cats you see around the zoo.



Balam

JAGUAR • MALE • BORN 8/20/2015

BORN AT

Ellen Trout Zoo
Lufkin, Texas

FAVORITE ENRICHMENT

Axe body spray

SOMETHING UNIQUE TO HIM

When Balam was a cub he had an accident that resulted in the loss of one of his front legs. Since he was so young when it happened he was able to adapt quickly and it rarely affects his mobility.

FUN FACT

Unlike other big cats that target the throat when catching prey, jaguars kill their prey by piercing directly through the skull.

Ashur

AFRICAN LION • MALE • BORN 7/15/2016

BORN AT

Ellen Trout Zoo
Lufkin, Texas

FAVORITE ENRICHMENT

Leaf piles and browse

SOMETHING UNIQUE TO HIM

While Ashur looks like a traditional lion now, he was born pure white.

FUN FACT

African lions are the only true social cats. They live in family groups called prides.



Axelle

AFRICAN LION • FEMALE • BORN 7/25/2015

BORN AT

San Antonio Zoological Gardens & Aquarium
San Antonio, Texas

FAVORITE ENRICHMENT

Tires

SOMETHING UNIQUE TO HER

Her favorite laying position is on her back with one foot up in the air, very similar to how a house cat will lay.

FUN FACT

A lions roar is the loudest of any big cat and can be heard up to 5 miles away.

Flake

BOBCAT • MALE • BORN 4/15/2009

BORN AT

Wild brought to the zoo after a car accident.

FAVORITE ENRICHMENT

Live fish

SOMETHING UNIQUE TO HIM

He is missing his right eye. He likes to hide but can be found either on his perching or behind his favorite stump at the back.

FUN FACT

A bobcat's cry or scream during mating season sounds unnervingly like a human woman screaming or a human baby crying.



Tanvir

MALAYAN TIGER • MALE • BORN 3/21/2009

BORN AT

Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden
Cincinnati, Ohio

FAVORITE ENRICHMENT

Christmas trees

SOMETHING UNIQUE TO HIM

Tanvir is allergic to humans so the vet staff and keepers use extra protective measures with him when training and doing physicals.

FUN FACT

There are estimated to be only around 80-150 adult Malaysian tigers in the wild.

Indy

CLOUDED LEOPARD • MALE • BORN 3/15/2016

BORN AT

Tanganyika Wildlife Park
Goddard, Kansas

FAVORITE ENRICHMENT

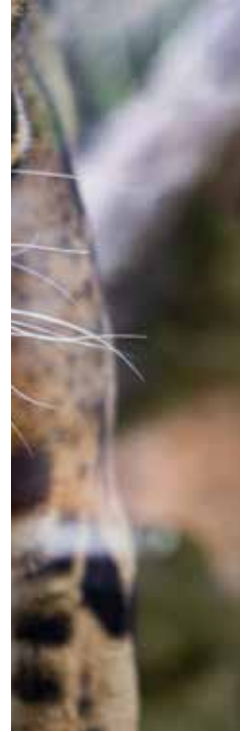
Jolly ball

HOW TO RECOGNIZE HIM

He is larger than Saffron and has a pinker nose with dots on it.

FUN FACT

Clouded leopards can rotate their rear ankles 180 degrees to allow them to climb down vertical tree trunks head first.



Saffron

CLOUDED LEOPARD • FEMALE • BORN 3/30/2016

BORN AT

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium
Tacoma, Washington

FAVORITE ENRICHMENT

Rabbit fur

HOW TO RECOGNIZE HER

Look for the two small lines across the bridge of her nose.

FUN FACT

Clouded leopards possess the longest canine teeth relative to body size of any living cat; they can be up to 2 inches long.

CARDBOARD CAT IN A 'SWEATER

BY HEATHER HATTON, MUSEUM OF EAST TEXAS

MATERIALS

Thin cardboard

Scissors

Markers

Scrap yarn

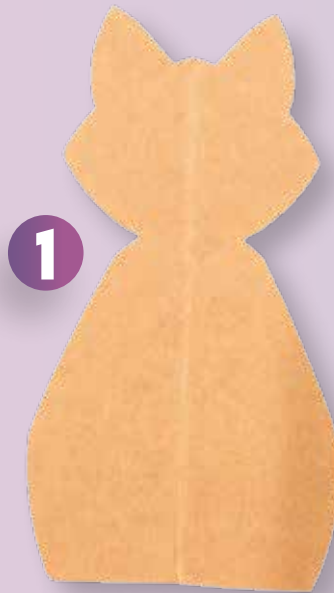
INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut the front or back panel from a cereal box or other thin cardboard. Draw a simple cat by making a tall rainbow shape for the body. Add a football-shaped head, triangle ears, and leave the bottom flat for the legs. Cut out the cat.

2. Decorate the face with markers or colored pencils. Color the ears, draw eyes, nose, mouth, whiskers, and cheeks.

3. Cut a slit from the bottom center about halfway up the body to create two legs. Add two short lines on each paw for toes.

4. Create a cozy sweater by wrapping scrap yarn around the cat's body several times. Tie the ends together on the back and trim any excess yarn.



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Feline Fun in Lufkin

FROM SABER-TOOTHED
CATS TO LOCAL SPOTS

BY KARINA SOTELO,
VISIT LUFKIN

A feline-themed day in Lufkin can turn into a full adventure through science, nature, shopping, and local fun.

Start with the experts at Ellen Trout Zoo, where guests can see incredible members of the cat family and learn about their habitats, behaviors, and conservation. The zoo is the heart of the animal experience, giving visitors a close look at the beauty and power of felines today.

Then, take the adventure back in time at the Naranjo Museum of Natural History. The museum is a great place to explore prehistoric life and learn about animals from long ago, including the famous Smilodon, better known as the saber-toothed cat. With its long canine teeth and Ice Age story, the saber-toothed cat adds a fun prehistoric twist to a feline-themed outing.

That mix of past and present makes Lufkin a great place to explore the cat family in a creative way. Guests can learn about wild cats living today at Ellen Trout Zoo, then imagine the ancient world through fossils and exhibits at Naranjo Museum of Natural History.

After the learning stops, keep the theme going around town. One playful place to add to the day is The Pink Leopard Boutique in downtown Lufkin. It is a fun shopping stop with a feline name that fits the theme perfectly.

A simple feline-themed day could look like this:

Start at Ellen Trout Zoo.

Visit Naranjo Museum of Natural History to learn about prehistoric animals like the saber-toothed cat.

Stop by The Pink Leopard Boutique for a little local shopping.

Grab lunch, coffee, or a sweet treat in downtown Lufkin.

Each stop brings something different to the story. Ellen Trout Zoo brings the living animal connection. Naranjo Museum brings the prehistoric wonder. Lufkin's shops and local stops turn the theme into a full day of memories. Plan your own feline-inspired adventure in Lufkin, and don't forget to

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THE BLACK CAT MYTH

HOW SUPERSTITION SHAPED ONE OF HALLOWEEN'S MOST FAMILIAR ANIMALS

Few animals are as closely tied to Halloween as the black cat.

With glowing eyes, silent steps, and a shadowy coat, a black cat can look mysterious even when it is simply walking across a room. Over time, that mysterious appearance helped black cats become part of stories, superstitions, and holiday imagery.

But the truth about black cats is much simpler than the myths. They are cats like any other: curious, playful, affectionate, independent, shy, bold, silly, or sweet, depending on the individual.

Their reputation says more about human imagination than it does about the animals themselves.

A CAT IN THE SHADOWS

Black cats have appeared in folklore for centuries, and not every culture viewed them the same way. In some places, they were seen as unlucky or connected to witchcraft. In others, they were considered symbols of good fortune, protection, or prosperity.

Part of the superstition may come from the way black cats look at night. A dark coat can blend into shadows, making the cat seem to appear or disappear suddenly. Their reflective eyes can shine in low light, adding to the mystery.

For people living before modern science explained animal behavior, illness, weather, and

chance, it was easy for ordinary animals to become part of supernatural stories. A cat crossing a path, appearing near a home, or walking through a village at night might be remembered as a sign, especially if something unusual happened afterward.

Over time, stories became traditions, and traditions became superstition.

CATS, WITCHES, & HALLOWEEN

The connection between black cats and Halloween grew from older European folklore about witches and magic. Cats were sometimes believed to be companions to witches, messengers, or even magical creatures in disguise. Because black cats were harder to see at night, they fit naturally into stories about moonlit roads, dark forests, and mysterious happenings.

As Halloween became more popular as a holiday, black cats became one of its classic symbols, along with bats, owls, pumpkins, ghosts, and witches. Today, black cats appear on decorations, costumes, greeting cards, and candy wrappers.

Most of those images are playful rather than frightening. Still, the old myths have not completely disappeared. Some people may still see black cats as spooky or unlucky, even though there is no reason to believe they bring anything but ordinary cat behavior.

FIND THE FELINES!

Ten cats are hidden in this issue. Can you find them all?



THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MYTH

A cat's coat color does not determine its personality or its luck.

Black fur is simply the result of genetics. Just as cats can be orange, gray, white, brown, striped, spotted, or calico, some cats are black. Their color does not make them dangerous, magical, unlucky, or different in any supernatural way.

What black cats do have is the same set of feline traits people have admired for thousands of years. They are quiet movers, excellent climbers, careful observers, and skilled hunters. They can be independent one moment and affectionate the next.

Those natural cat behaviors may have helped fuel the myths, but they are also part of what makes cats so fascinating.

WHEN MYTHS AFFECT REAL ANIMALS

Superstitions may sound harmless, but they can affect real animals.

Black cats are sometimes overlooked in shelters because people are drawn to cats with more visible markings or because old myths still influence how they feel about them. They can also be harder to photograph well, which may make it more difficult for their personalities to shine in adoption pictures.

Around Halloween, some animal shelters and rescue groups take extra care with black cat adoptions. Their goal is not to treat black cats as scary, but to make sure every animal goes to a safe, responsible home.

The best way to help black cats is to see them as individuals, not symbols. A black cat may be playful, calm, talkative, shy, cuddly, mischievous, or dignified. Like any animal, each one has its own personality.

BEYOND THE MYTH

Black cats have carried many meanings through history. They have been feared, admired, protected, misunderstood, and celebrated.

Today, they remain a favorite part of Halloween imagery, but they deserve to be known for more than superstition. Behind the glowing eyes and dark fur is a real animal with real needs, real behavior, and real personality.

A black cat crossing your path is not a warning. It is simply a cat going somewhere.

And that may be the most cat-like thing of all.



WHERE THE
Desert
MEETS THE
Sea



GRIET VAN MALDEREN



WILL STEENKAMP

When most people picture an African lion, they imagine open grasslands, scattered trees and herds of antelope moving across the savanna. Along Namibia's remote Skeleton Coast, lions live in a very different world.

Here, towering sand dunes meet the cold Atlantic Ocean. Rain is scarce, prey can be difficult to find, and miles of coastline may appear almost empty. Yet a small population of desert-adapted lions has learned to survive in this harsh landscape by looking for food in one of the last places anyone might expect: the beach.

LIONS BY THE OCEAN

The lions of northwestern Namibia are ordinary African lions, *Panthera leo*, but life in the Namib Desert has shaped some extraordinary behavior.

As they travel across huge territories in search of food and water, some reach the Skeleton Coast, where the desert ends at the Atlantic. There, researchers have documented lions hunting Cape fur seals and marine birds such as cormorants and flamingos.

These lions may patrol beaches and move into the intertidal zone, turning the ocean into an important source of food. That makes them unusual even among lions. Elsewhere, lions may occasionally scavenge unusual prey, but some Skeleton Coast lions have repeatedly specialized in hunting marine animals.

Imagine a lion stalking across a beach while waves break behind it—and the animal it is watching is a seal.

A SKILL LOST AND FOUND AGAIN

Coastal hunting is not new for Namibia's lions. Decades ago, lions along the Skeleton Coast were already using food from the ocean. In 1985, a male was even seen feeding on a pilot whale that had washed ashore.

But drought, declining prey and conflict with livestock farmers took a severe toll. By around 1990, the known lions of Skeleton Coast National Park

had disappeared, and the behavior seemed to disappear with them.

As desert-adapted lions later returned to the region, coastal hunting appeared again. Researchers documented lionesses learning to hunt seals and cormorants, and one later passed that knowledge to her cubs.

The behavior was not something the lions were born knowing. They learned it—and in some cases, passed it to the next generation.

SURVIVAL MEANS ADAPTING

For animals living in one of the driest places on Earth, that flexibility can be critical.

Marine prey can provide an important alternative when land-based animals are scarce. It does not make the Skeleton Coast lions a different species. Instead, it shows how adaptable lions can be.

Strength is only part of their success. Lions also learn, adjust and respond to the world around them.

A zebra may be typical lion prey.

A seal certainly is not.

Along Namibia's Atlantic coast, however, the rules are different.

A ZEBRA MAY BE
TYPICAL LION
PREY. A SEAL
CERTAINLY IS NOT.

THE SAME CAT, A DIFFERENT WORLD

Visitors to Ellen Trout Zoo can see African lions much closer to home.

Our two lions belong to the same species as the cats walking the beaches of Namibia. They share the powerful build, keen senses and social nature that have helped lions survive across a wide variety of African habitats.

What changes is how those abilities are used.

On the savanna, lions may hunt wildebeest or zebra. Along the Skeleton Coast, some have learned that the ocean itself can provide dinner.

So, the next time you watch the lions at Ellen Trout Zoo, picture their distant relatives nearly half a world away walking across sand with the Atlantic behind them and a colony of seals ahead.

They are still lions.

They have simply learned a very different way to be one.

SMALL CATS, BIG WORLD



Sand Cat

NORTH AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, & CENTRAL AMERICA

The sand cat is built for desert life. It has a pale sandy coat, large ears, and fur on the bottoms of its feet that helps protect its paws from hot sand. These cats live in some of the driest habitats on Earth, where they hunt small rodents, reptiles, birds, and insects.

Because they are mostly nocturnal and live in remote desert regions, sand cats are rarely seen by people.



Fishing Cat

SOUTH & SOUTHEAST ASIA

The fishing cat is one of the most unusual small wild cats because it is strongly tied to water. It lives near wetlands, marshes, mangroves, rivers, and other watery habitats.

As its name suggests, the fishing cat is known for catching fish, but it may also eat frogs, crustaceans, birds, and small mammals. Its life depends on healthy wetlands, which makes habitat loss a major concern for the species.

When people think of wild cats, they often picture lions, tigers, leopards, or jaguars. But most wild cats are much smaller and far less famous. Around the world, small cats live in deserts, forests, wetlands, mountains, grasslands, and rocky landscapes. Each species is shaped by the place it calls home.



Margay

MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA & SOUTH AMERICA

The margay is a spotted forest cat known for its climbing ability. It has a long tail, flexible ankles, and the agility to move through trees with ease.

Margays live in tropical and subtropical forests, where their patterned coats help them blend into leaves, branches, and shadows. They are mostly active at night and can be difficult to study because they spend so much time in dense forest.



Kodkod

CHILE & ARGENTINA

The kodkod, also called the guiña, is one of the smallest wild cats in the Americas. It lives mainly in forests and shrublands of southern Chile and parts of Argentina. Though tiny, the kodkod is a skilled hunter. It feeds on small mammals, birds, reptiles, and insects. Like many small cats, it can be threatened when forests are cleared or broken into smaller pieces.



Black-footed Cat

SOUTHERN AFRICA

The black-footed cat is one of the smallest wild cats in the world, but it is a fierce and successful hunter. It lives in dry grasslands, savannas, and semi-desert regions of southern Africa.

These cats are mostly nocturnal and spend their nights searching for small prey such as rodents, birds, insects, and reptiles. Their small size makes them easy to overlook, but they are perfectly adapted to life in open, dry landscapes.



Pallas's Cat

CENTRAL ASIA

With a flat-looking face, thick fur, and a round body, Pallas's cat looks very different from many other cats. It lives in cold, rocky grasslands and high-elevation landscapes across parts of Central Asia. Its dense coat helps protect it from cold temperatures, while its low body and short legs help it move through open terrain. Pallas's cats often use rocky crevices or burrows for shelter.



Rusty-spotted Cat

INDIA, SRI LANKA, & NEPAL

The rusty-spotted cat is one of the smallest wild cats on Earth. It has a slender body, large eyes, and a coat marked with small rusty-colored spots. This tiny cat lives in forests, scrublands, grasslands, and sometimes areas near farms or villages. Its size may be small, but it is still a true wild predator, hunting small animals mostly under cover of night.



Flat-headed Cat

SOUTHEAST ASIA

The flat-headed cat lives in wetland and forest habitats in parts of Southeast Asia, especially areas near rivers, swamps, and peat forests.

It has a long, low head shape, small ears, and adaptations that help it hunt near water. Like the fishing cat, it depends on wet habitats, making it vulnerable when wetlands are drained, polluted, or converted for human use.



Andean Mountain Cat

HIGH ANDES OF SOUTH AMERICA

The Andean Mountain cat is one of the rarest and least-known wild cats in the Americas. It lives in rocky, high-altitude areas of the Andes Mountains. Its thick fur, long tail, and muted coloring help it survive in cold mountain habitats. This cat is closely tied to rugged landscapes where prey can be scarce and conditions are harsh.



Scottish Wildcat

SCOTTISH HIGHLANDS

Often called the "Highland tiger," the Scottish wildcat looks a little like a large, rugged tabby, but it is a true wild cat. It has a thick, ringed tail, bold stripes, and a reputation for being fierce and elusive. Scottish wildcats live in remote parts of the Scottish Highlands, where woodlands, moorlands, and rough grasslands provide cover and hunting grounds. They are threatened by habitat loss, past persecution, and especially hybridization with domestic cats.

Small wild cats may be easy to overlook, but they are an important part of the cat family. From deserts and wetlands to forests and mountains, each species is shaped by the place it calls home.

Protecting these lesser-known cats means protecting those wild places — and remembering that wildness is not always loud, large, or easy to see.



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A HIGHWAY THROUGH THE WILD



THEIR SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON MORE THAN PARKS AND REFUGES. IT ALSO DEPENDS ON THE WORKING LANDS BETWEEN THEM.

A Florida panther may travel through forests, wetlands, cattle ranches, citrus groves, and roads in a single journey. To the cat, these places are not separate properties or counties. They are one landscape.

That landscape is becoming harder to cross.

Florida panthers once ranged across much of the southeastern United States. Today, the core breeding population is concentrated in South Florida, where the cats share a rapidly changing landscape with farms, ranches, highways, towns, and growing development. Their survival depends not only on protected parks and refuges, but also on the working lands between them.

That is why ranchers, farmers, landowners, scientists, and conservation groups are working together to preserve pathways through Florida, creating a kind of green highway where panthers and other wildlife can move safely.

Florida panthers need space. They are solitary animals, and each may travel across a large home range while hunting, finding mates, or searching for territory. Young males may travel especially far as they leave their mothers and look for a place of their own.

When habitat is divided by roads, housing, or other development, those journeys become more dangerous. Panthers may be forced to cross traffic, move through unfamiliar areas, or become trapped in smaller patches of habitat.

Vehicle collisions remain one of their greatest threats. Wildlife crossings help address part of the problem. These underpasses and modified bridges allow panthers and other animals to pass beneath busy roads. Fencing helps guide wildlife toward the crossings instead of into traffic. Where crossings and fencing have been installed, panther deaths have dropped sharply. But safe road crossings are only useful if suitable habitat exists on both sides.

The Florida Wildlife Corridor is a broad network of forests, wetlands, ranches, farms, rivers, and conservation lands stretching through the state. It connects many of Florida's wild places, helping animals move between them rather than becoming isolated.

Much of that land is privately owned. Working cattle ranches can provide important panther habitat, especially when they include woods, wetlands, creeks, brushes, and other natural areas. A ranch may also connect two larger protected areas, forming a vital link in the path wildlife uses across the state.

For many ranching families, preserving that land also means preserving a way of life. Development pressures can make selling land tempting or sometimes necessary. Conservation easements offer another option. A landowner can agree to keep property from being heavily developed while continuing to own, ranch, farm, and manage it. The land remains productive, but its value as wildlife habitat is protected.

Florida has also introduced a voluntary program that pays participating landowners for maintaining high-priority panther habitat. Additional payments may be available when landowners help monitor panthers or document their use of the property. The idea is simple: providing habitat benefits the public and wildlife, but it can place costs and responsibilities on private landowners. Compensation recognizes the role those landowners play in keeping the landscape connected.

These partnerships do not mean ranchers and conservationists always agree on every issue. Panthers can prey on calves, goats, poultry, or pets, creating real concerns for people living and working in panther country. Programs that offer practical advice, better animal enclosures, monitoring, and help following livestock losses are important parts of building trust. Successful conservation must make room for both wildlife and people.

The Florida panther has already survived one dramatic brush with extinction. By the 1990s, only a small number remained, and inbreeding had caused serious health problems. The introduction of female mountain lions from Texas increased genetic diversity and helped strengthen the population.

Today, Florida wildlife officials estimate that roughly 120 to 230 adult panthers remain. That is a major improvement, but it is still a small population living in a region under constant pressure.

Their future may depend on whether they can expand northward and establish breeding populations beyond South Florida. To do that, females as well as males must be able to move through connected habitat safely.

A wildlife corridor is not a fenced lane built only for panthers. It is a living network of public and private land—places where forests remain standing, wetlands still hold water, ranches stay open, and roads include safer ways to cross.

Panthers are not the only animals that benefit. Black bears, deer, bobcats, reptiles, birds, and countless smaller species use many of the same connected landscapes.

The Florida panther's path forward may run through a state forest, beneath a highway, along a river, and across a family cattle ranch. Protecting that path does not require removing people from the landscape. It requires people to see themselves as part of it.

When ranchers and conservationists protect the ground between Florida's wild places, they are building more than a corridor. They are keeping the road home open.

COULD CORRIDORS HELP JAGUARS RETURN TO THE U.S.?

Jaguars once ranged into Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and other parts of the American Southwest. Today, occasional males still travel north from Mexico into southern Arizona, but the United States has no known breeding population.

Like Florida panthers, jaguars need large areas of connected habitat. Roads, development, fencing, and other barriers can make long-distance movement more difficult. Protecting travel routes across ranches, public lands, and international borders could help wandering jaguars reach suitable habitat in the United States.

Wildlife corridors alone cannot guarantee the jaguar's return. A lasting population would require enough habitat, prey, public support, and access for both males and females. But the Florida panther shows why protecting connections matters.

Before an animal can return, it must have a safe way to get there.



Bastet

The Cat Goddess of Ancient Egypt

In ancient Egypt, cats were admired for more than their beauty. They were watchful, graceful, independent, and quick to defend themselves when needed. Those qualities helped make the cat one of Egypt's most recognizable sacred animals.

One of the most famous figures connected to cats was Bastet, a goddess associated with protection, home, joy, music, motherhood, and feminine strength. She was often shown as a woman with the head of a cat, or as a seated cat wearing jewelry.

To the ancient Egyptians, Bastet represented the many sides of a cat's nature: gentle but alert, calm but powerful, affectionate but never helpless.

GENTLE PROTECTOR

Bastet's image changed over time. In earlier periods, she was sometimes connected with the fierce power of a lioness. Like other protective goddesses, she could represent strength, defense, and the ability to strike against danger.

Over time, Bastet became more closely associated with domestic cats. This did not make her less powerful. Instead, it showed a different kind of strength.

A house cat may seem peaceful while resting in the sun, but it is still a skilled hunter with sharp senses and quick reflexes. Bastet reflected that same balance. She could be loving and joyful, but she was also a guardian of homes and families.

HOME, JOY, & GOOD FORTUNE

Bastet was often connected with the household, motherhood, fertility, music, dance, and celebration. She represented protection not only in danger, but in daily life.

For families, protection could mean safety at home, healthy children, stored food, and freedom from harmful animals such as rodents or snakes. Cats helped guard homes

and grain stores from pests, so it makes sense that a cat goddess would become linked with care, security, and good fortune.

Bastet's most important center of worship was the city of Bubastis in the Nile Delta. People traveled there to honor her, bringing offerings such as small statues, amulets, and other objects connected with the goddess.

WHY A CAT?

Cats were already important in Egyptian life. They hunted mice, rats, and snakes, helping protect food and homes. They were clean, observant, and independent. They could be affectionate with people, but they also kept a mysterious distance.

Those traits made cats powerful symbols. A cat could curl beneath a chair in a family home, then appear in sacred art as a sign of divine protection. Bastet brought those two worlds together.

Through Bastet, the familiar house cat became a sacred image of balance: gentle and fierce, playful and powerful, domestic and divine.

BASTET'S LASTING LEGACY

Thousands of years later, Bastet remains one of the most recognizable figures from ancient Egypt. Her statues, amulets, and cat-headed images still capture the imagination.

Part of that lasting appeal may be because cats themselves have not changed much in the way people see them. They are still graceful, watchful, affectionate on their own terms, and full of mystery.

Bastet gave sacred form to qualities cat lovers still recognize today: a protector, a bringer of joy, a guardian of the home, and a reminder that power does not always have to roar. Sometimes, it watches quietly from the shadows, with bright eyes and silent paws.

ROAR

BY DR. STORMY PERRY, DVM

When you hear the words “big cat,” what comes to mind? Most people will think of lions or tigers, or maybe even leopards. And while these are, by size, “big cats,” it is not their size that makes them a big cat. For instance, mountain lions are similar in size to another big cat, the snow leopard, but are not big cats themselves. In contrast, clouded leopards, which are about the size of a medium-sized dog, are considered a “big cat.” Let’s break down the nuances between big and small cats.

There are two ways to classify our big cats, one based on taxonomy and the other on anatomy. The most common description you will likely hear is that big cats are composed of the felines in the genus *Panthera*. These include lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars and snow leopards. Now, you may remember that we mentioned clouded leopards are big cats, though their genus is *Neofelis*. However, all these cats share a subfamily known as *Pantherinae*, which is characterized by a partially ossified (hardened) hyoid bone with elastic tendons that enable the larynx (voice box) to move. With long vocal cords, this specialized anatomy allows all but the snow leopard to roar! Roaring is often used for communication or

intimidation. The lion has the most robust roar and, in good conditions, can be heard from 5–6 miles away!

In contrast, all other cats belong to the subfamily Felinae, which have completely bony hyoid bones that keep the voice box close to the base of the skull. Animals in this group include bobcats, cheetahs, mountain lions, lynx, servals, caracals and our own domestic cats! With shorter vocal cords, these cats are unable to roar but can purr. An animal may purr for a variety of reasons, mostly to express happiness, but also to self-soothe when uncomfortable. No cat can both roar and purr due to the anatomical differences needed to produce these sounds. As mentioned above, snow leopards are unique in that they are the only big cat that can’t roar but can purr.

Felines are a remarkable and unique group of animals, even beyond what is described here. They are some of the best-known and most awe-inspiring animals in captivity, and by learning more about them, we can come to understand and appreciate their part in the ecosystem. Conservation starts with education, and now you know some cool facts about cats that you can roar about!

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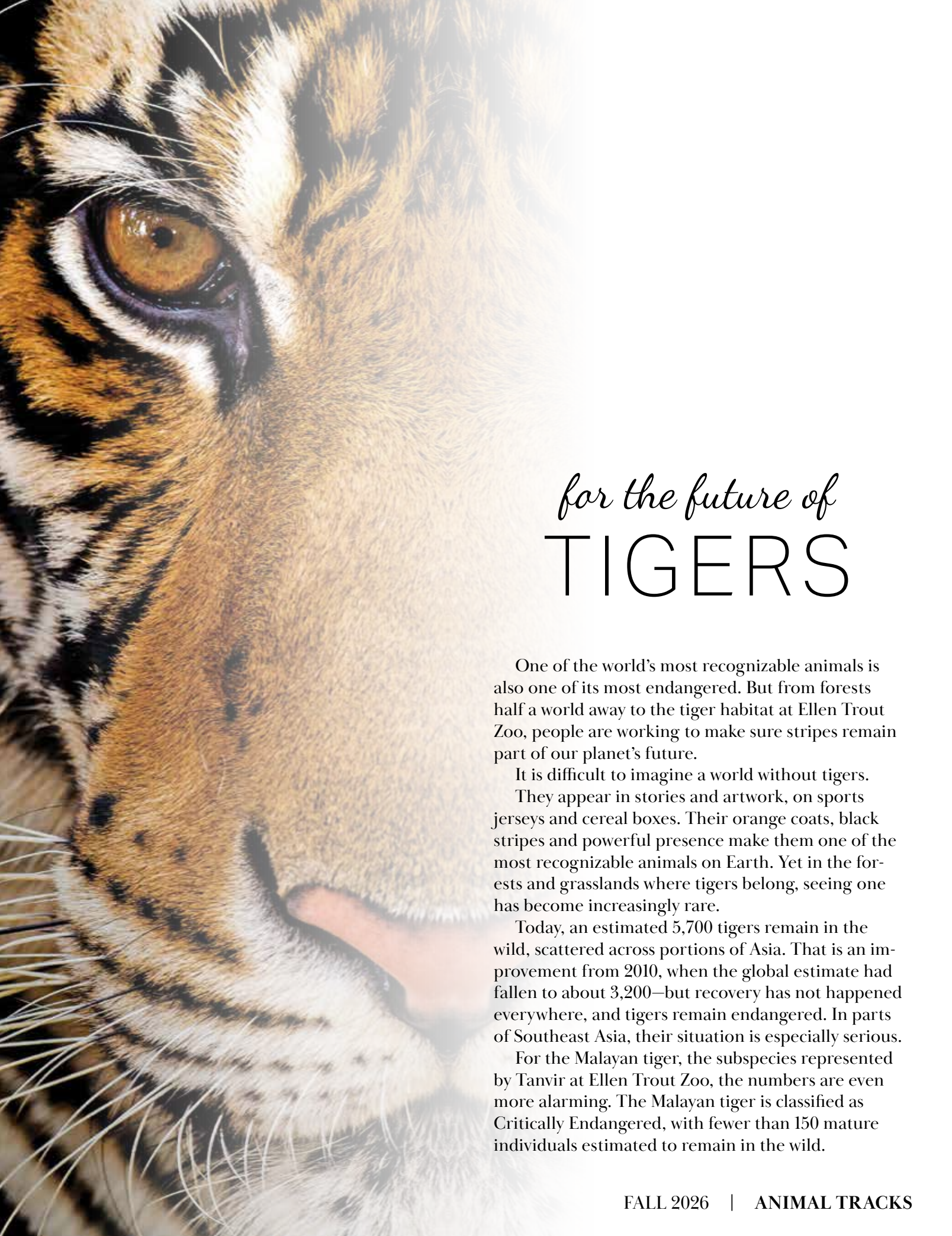
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for the future of TIGERS

One of the world's most recognizable animals is also one of its most endangered. But from forests half a world away to the tiger habitat at Ellen Trout Zoo, people are working to make sure stripes remain part of our planet's future.

It is difficult to imagine a world without tigers.

They appear in stories and artwork, on sports jerseys and cereal boxes. Their orange coats, black stripes and powerful presence make them one of the most recognizable animals on Earth. Yet in the forests and grasslands where tigers belong, seeing one has become increasingly rare.

Today, an estimated 5,700 tigers remain in the wild, scattered across portions of Asia. That is an improvement from 2010, when the global estimate had fallen to about 3,200—but recovery has not happened everywhere, and tigers remain endangered. In parts of Southeast Asia, their situation is especially serious.

For the Malayan tiger, the subspecies represented by Tanvir at Ellen Trout Zoo, the numbers are even more alarming. The Malayan tiger is classified as Critically Endangered, with fewer than 150 mature individuals estimated to remain in the wild.

LOSING GROUND

A tiger needs much more than a patch of forest.

It needs enough territory to roam, enough prey to hunt and safe routes between areas where other tigers live. When forests are cleared or divided by roads, farms and development, those pieces of habitat become smaller and more isolated.

That can push tigers closer to people and livestock, increasing the chance of conflict. It can also make it harder for individual tigers to find mates and establish territories.

Poaching presents another enormous threat. Tigers are illegally killed for their skins and body parts, while snares placed for other wildlife can injure or kill tigers and remove the prey animals they depend upon. Habitat loss, illegal wildlife trade and conflict with people remain among the major threats facing wild tigers today.

And once tigers disappear from an area, bringing them back is extraordinarily difficult. Tigers have already vanished from several countries where they lived within recent decades, including Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.

THERE IS GOOD NEWS

The tiger story is not only one of decline.

In 2010, when wild tiger numbers had reached an alarming low, countries with wild tiger populations joined conservation organizations in an ambitious international effort to reverse the trend.

Since then, tiger numbers have increased in several countries. Nepal nearly tripled its wild tiger population between 2009 and 2022, while India has also recorded substantial growth. More recently, conservationists reported increasing tiger numbers in Thailand after years of habitat protection, monitoring and anti-poaching work.

Those successes show something important: when tigers are given protected habitat, adequate prey and protection from poaching, populations can recover.

Saving them, however, requires long-term work. Conservation teams use camera traps to identify and count individual tigers. Rangers patrol protected areas and remove illegal snares. Scientists study where tigers travel and identify habitat corridors that need protection. Conservation programs also work with communities that share the landscape with these enormous predators, helping find ways for people and tigers to coexist.

Protecting tiger habitat has benefits far beyond tigers themselves. A landscape large and healthy enough to support a top predator also provides habitat for countless other plants and animals.

FROM LUFKIN TO THE WILD

That global conservation story has a connection right here in East Texas.

Visitors to Ellen Trout Zoo can meet Tanvir, our male Malayan tiger. Like other animals living at accredited zoos, Tanvir gives visitors an opportunity most people will never have in the wild: the chance to stand only a short distance from a tiger and see the animal behind all those familiar stripes.

That connection matters. It is much easier to understand why an animal is worth protecting when you have watched one move through the grass, heard its vocalizations or looked into its eyes.

But our connection to tiger conservation does not end at the edge of Tanvir's habitat. Ellen Trout Zoo also contributes financially to conservation efforts like the Tiger Conservation Campaign working to protect tigers beyond the zoo. Those dollars join support from organizations and people around the world funding the work that happens where wild tigers still roam.

No single zoo, conservation group or country can save tigers alone. Their future depends on protected landscapes, dedicated wildlife professionals, local communities, governments—and people willing to support the work.

WORTH FIGHTING FOR

Wild tigers are still in danger, and the Malayan tiger remains perilously close to disappearing altogether. But the increases seen in some tiger populations prove that extinction is not inevitable.

There is still time.

The tiger standing before you at Ellen Trout Zoo represents more than one magnificent animal. Tanvir is part of a species whose future is being decided right now—and a reminder that conservation can begin thousands of miles from the forests where wild tigers live.

Every protected acre, every removed snare, every conservation dollar and every person inspired to care adds another piece to the effort.

For an animal that has lost so much ground, there is still a path forward.

STRIPES, SPOTS, & SHADOWS

At first glance, a tiger's stripes or a jaguar's rosettes may seem bold, beautiful, and impossible to miss. But in the wild, those same patterns can help a cat vanish.

Felines are hunters built for patience, silence, and surprise. Their coats do not need to make them completely invisible. Instead, spots, stripes, and shadows help break up the outline of the body, blend into patches of light, or match the colors of the world around them. From rainforest shadows to tall grass, every pattern has a purpose.

WHY SO MANY PATTERNS?

Feline coats are not one-size-fits-all. A cat's pattern often matches the habitat where that species hunts. Spotted and rosetted cats may blend well in forests, where sunlight filters through leaves in scattered patches. Striped cats can disappear among grasses, reeds, and tree

shadows. Sandy-colored cats may be harder to see in open landscapes. Camouflage also works best when the animal stays still. A moving cat is easier to notice, but a crouching cat hidden in shadow can be incredibly difficult to see. Their coats help, but patience completes the disguise.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

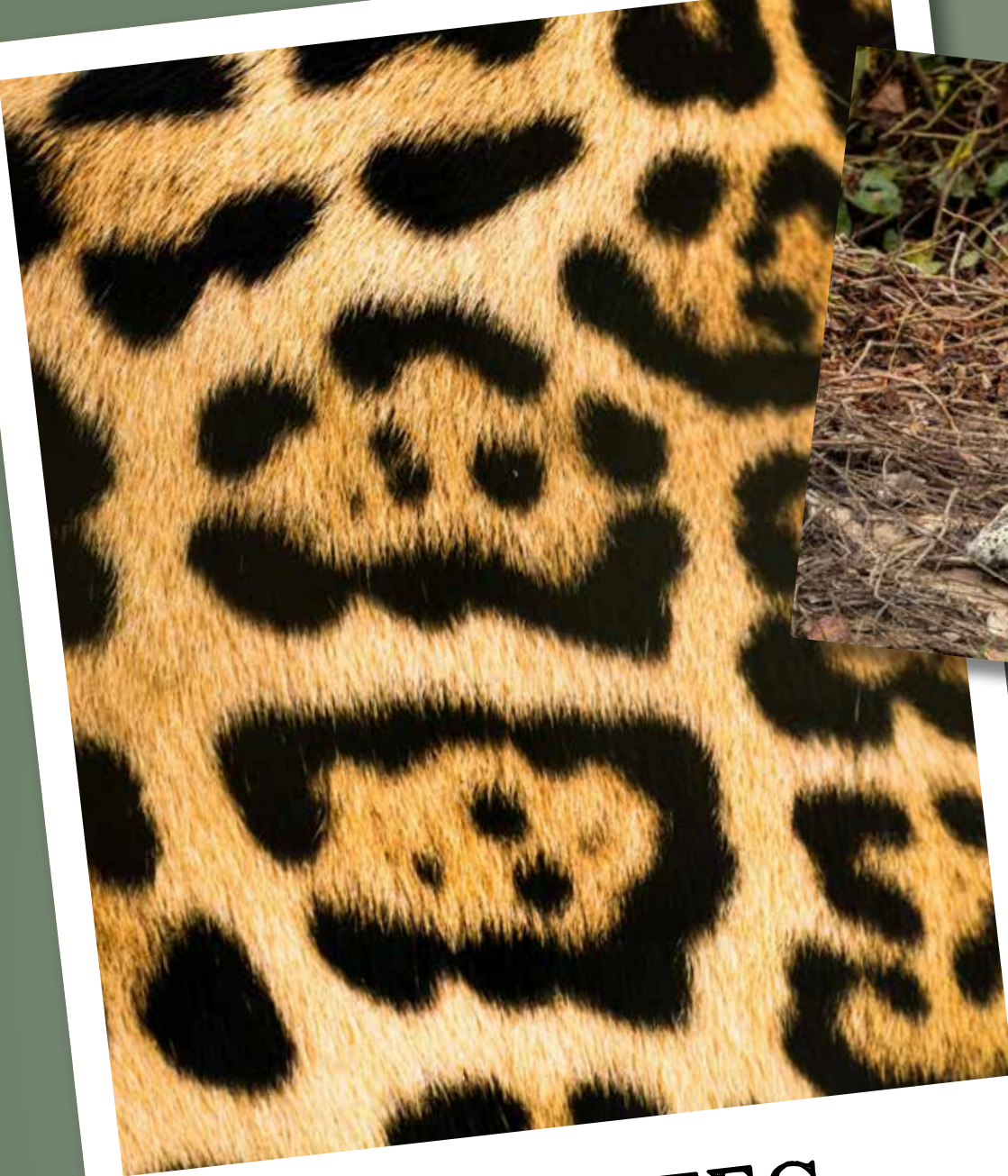
The patterns on feline coats are beautiful, but they are more than decoration. They are tools for survival, shaped by habitat, hunting style, and the need to move unseen. A jaguar's rosettes echo broken forest shadows. A tiger's stripes mimic grass and trees. A bobcat's mottled coat blends with brush and leaves. A clouded leopard's markings look like patches of shade in the canopy. A lion's golden coat melts into dry grass. To us, these patterns may stand out. In the wild, they help cats do what felines do best: watch, wait, and disappear.



STRIPES

THE TIGER'S TALL-GRASS DISGUISE

A tiger may be bright orange and covered in black stripes, but that coat works surprisingly well in the right setting. Tigers often move through forests, reeds, and tall grasses where vertical lines are everywhere. Tree trunks, grass stems, bamboo, shadows, and shafts of sunlight all create narrow bands of dark and light. A tiger's stripes help its body blend into that striped world. To human eyes, orange may seem like a strange camouflage color. But many prey animals do not see color the same way humans do. The tiger's stripes and body shape matter more than the exact shade of orange. In the right habitat, a tiger can crouch low, stay still, and almost disappear.



ROSETTES

THE JAGUAR'S FOREST PUZZLE

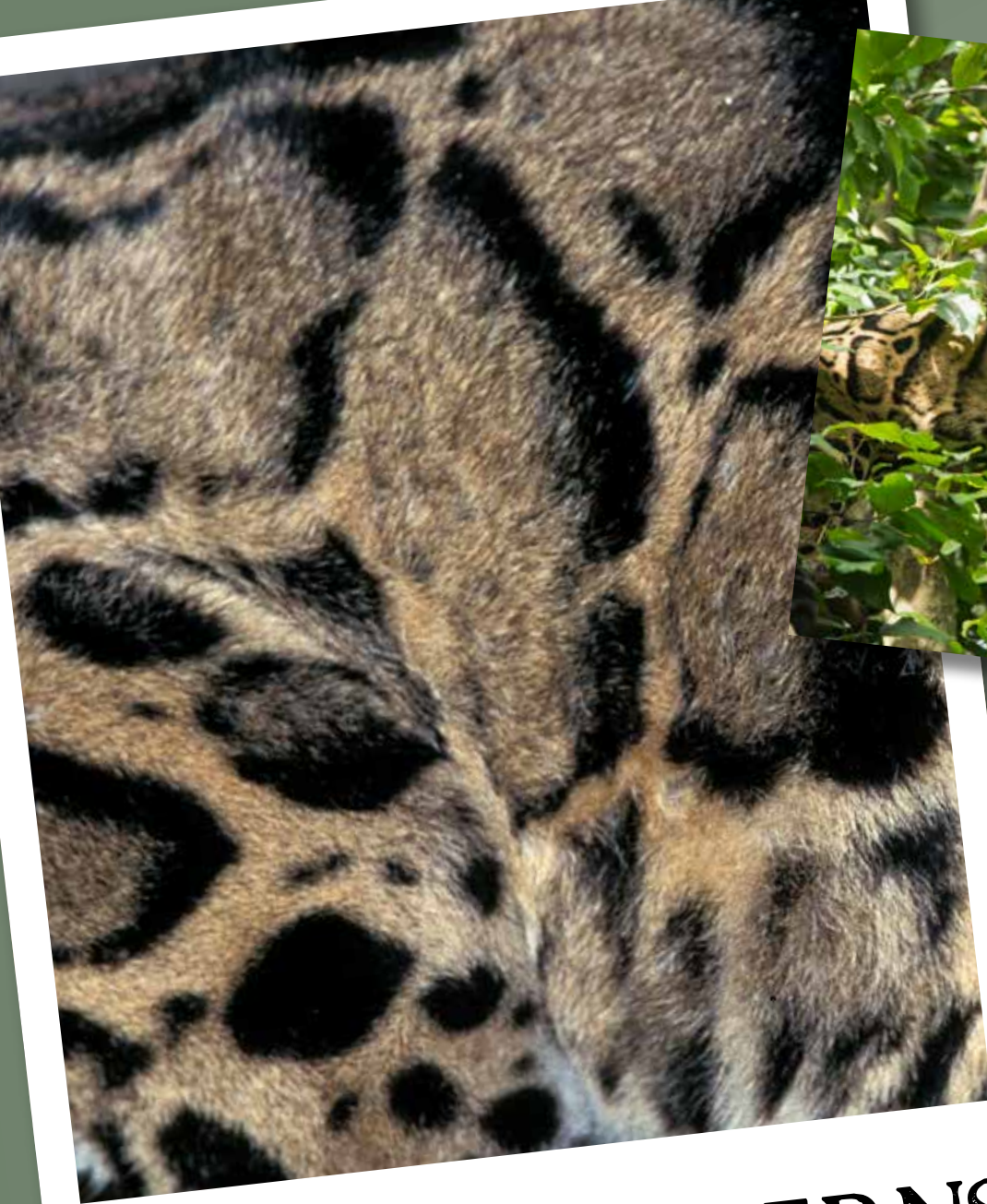
Jaguars are covered in dark markings called rosettes. These are not simple spots. A rosette is a broken ring or flower-shaped marking, and on jaguars, many of those rings have smaller spots inside them. In the forests, wetlands, and dense vegetation where jaguars live, sunlight often filters through leaves in scattered patches. The jaguar's rosettes can look like that same mix of light and shadow. Instead of seeing one large cat-shaped outline, prey may see a broken-up pattern that blends into branches, leaves, and darkness. That camouflage is especially useful for a powerful ambush hunter. Jaguars do not need to chase prey over long distances. They rely on getting close before making their move.



LION COLORATION

HIDING WITHOUT SPOTS

Not every cat needs spots or stripes. Lions are usually a sandy, golden, or tawny color, which helps them blend into dry grasses and open savannas. A lion's camouflage is less about breaking up the body with a complicated pattern and more about matching the landscape. When a lion crouches low in grass, its coat can blend beautifully with the sunlit yellows, browns, and tans around it. This is especially important for lionesses, who do most of the hunting. Working together, they use cover, patience, and timing to get close to prey. Male lions may be easier to notice because of their manes, but even a mane can blend into shadow, brush, or dry grass depending on the light.



CLOUDED PATTERNS

THE CLOUDED LEOPARD'S BROKEN SHADOWS

The clouded leopard gets its name from the large, cloud-like markings across its body. These bold shapes are different from the smaller rosettes of a jaguar or leopard. They look like wide, dark-edged patches, almost as if shadows have settled across the coat. Clouded leopards live in forested habitats where branches, vines, leaves, and uneven light create a busy background. Their coat pattern breaks up the body and helps them blend into that layered world. These cats are also excellent climbers. In trees, their markings can help them disappear among branches and shifting patches of shade.



BOBCAT MARKINGS

SMALL CAT, BIG CAMOUFLAGE

Bobcats may not have the dramatic coat of a tiger or jaguar, but their markings are perfect for the places they live. Their coats are usually tawny, grayish, or brown with darker spots and streaks. This helps them blend into brush, dry grass, rocky ground, fallen leaves, and woodland shadows. Their spotted legs, barred tails, and mottled bodies all help soften their outline. For a bobcat, camouflage is useful on both sides of survival. It helps them sneak up on rabbits, rodents, birds, and other prey, but it can also help them avoid being seen by larger animals or people. A bobcat sitting still in tall grass or under a thicket can be much harder to spot than you might expect.

the power HOW CATS USE SMELL TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD *of SCENT*

For people, the world is often shaped by what we see. For cats, the world is also full of invisible information. A scent on a tree, a scratch on a log, or a strange smell carried on the breeze can tell a cat who has been nearby, where they have traveled, and even whether another animal may be friend, rival, or prey. Long before a cat ever sees another animal, it may already know something is there.

For felines, smell is more than a sense. It is a way to explore, communicate, and understand their surroundings.

A NOSE FOR INFORMATION

Cats have an excellent sense of smell. They use it to investigate food, recognize familiar animals, find potential mates, and learn about changes in their environment.

A new scent can be exciting, suspicious, or worth a very careful inspection. That is why cats often pause to sniff objects, pathways, bedding, toys, or enrichment items before deciding what to do next. To them, scent is not just a smell. It is information. A cat may smell where another animal walked, where it rested, or what it touched. In the wild, this can help a cat avoid danger, find prey, or keep track of other cats in the area.

LEAVING A MESSAGE BEHIND

Cats also use scent to communicate. Many felines mark their surroundings by rubbing, scratching, spraying, or leaving scent from glands on different parts of the body. When a cat rubs its face against a branch, rock, person, or favorite object, it may be leaving behind scent from glands around the cheeks and mouth. Scratching can also leave scent from glands in the paws, along with a visible mark. These signs can tell other animals, “I was here.”

For wild cats, scent marking is an important part of territory. It can help reduce conflict by letting other cats know that space is already being used. Instead of meeting face-to-face, which could lead to injury, cats can gather information from scent marks left behind. Scent marks may fade over time, so cats often revisit important places to refresh them.

THE FLEHMEN RESPONSE

Sometimes a cat may smell something interesting, then pause with its mouth slightly open and its upper lip lifted. It may look surprised, silly, or like it has just made a strange face. This is called the flehmen response. During flehmen, the cat is drawing scent molecules toward a special scent-detecting structure

called the vomeronasal organ, also known as Jacobson's organ. This organ helps cats gather additional information from certain smells, especially scents connected to other animals.

Many mammals use the flehmen response, including domestic cats, big cats, horses, goats, and many hoofed animals. It may look funny to us, but for the animal, it is a serious investigation.

SCENT AND TERRITORY

For many cats, territory is not only about space. It is also about scent. A wild cat's home range may include hunting areas, resting places, travel paths, and important scent-marking spots. By leaving scent behind, a cat can help create a familiar map of its surroundings. These scent markers can make an area feel known and claimed.

Scent can also help cats avoid unnecessary meetings. If one cat smells that another cat has recently passed through, it may choose a different route or move more carefully. In this way, scent can work like a quiet conversation between animals that never actually see each other.

ENRICHMENT THROUGH SMELL

At zoos, scent is often used as enrichment for cats and other animals. Enrichment encourages natural behaviors, gives animals choices, and adds variety to their day.

Keepers may offer safe scents on logs, boxes, burlap bags, toys, or other items. Some scents may encourage a cat to sniff, rub, roll, paw, scratch, or investigate. Others may lead to scent marking or flehmen.

Different cats may react in different ways. One cat may be fascinated by a scent, while another may ignore it completely. That is part of what makes scent enrichment interesting. It gives each animal a chance to respond in its own way.

Common scent enrichment may include herbs, spices, animal-safe perfumes, or scents from prey animals or other species. All enrichment is chosen carefully and monitored by animal care staff.

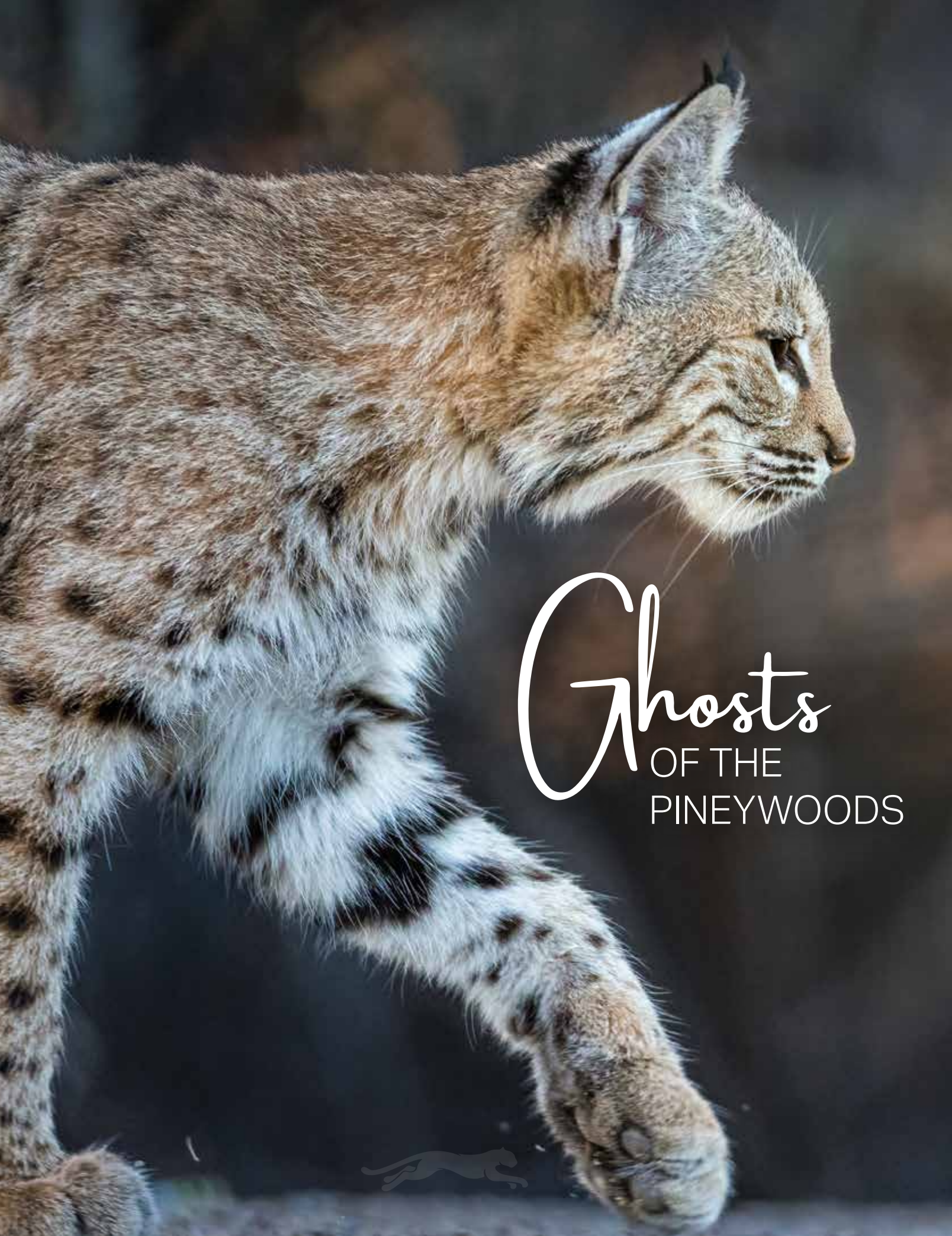
MORE THAN A SMELL

To a cat, scent can reveal a story. It can say that prey passed through the grass, that another cat marked a tree, that a familiar keeper handled an item, or that something new has entered the habitat. It can help a cat explore without touching, communicate without making a sound, and gather information from the world around it.

The next time you see a cat pause to sniff, rub its cheek on a branch, scratch a log, or make that open-mouthed flehmen face, remember: it may be reading a message we cannot see.

For felines, the world is not just seen. It is scented.





Ghosts
OF THE
PINEYWOODS



Somewhere along a narrow game trail or near the edge of a slow-moving creek, a bobcat steps silently out from the cover of the brush.

You're unlikely to hear it. Its paws land softly, carefully, one after the other. You might not see it either. Its spotted coat blends perfectly with the shifting patterns of light and shadow, disappearing into the forest floor as easily as it appears. But it's there, moving with quiet confidence through a world it knows well.

Bobcats are one of the most common wild cats in Texas, yet they remain one of the least seen. About twice the size of a house cat, they are compact and powerful, with a short "bobbed" tail and tufted ears that give them their name. Despite their wide range—from deep forests to brushy edges and even areas near neighborhoods, most people will go their entire lives without spotting one. It's this ability to move unseen that has earned them a fitting nickname: ghosts of the Pineywoods.

As dusk settles in, the bobcat's night shift begins. These cats are most active during the early morning and evening hours, but they often continue their patrols well into the darkness. Guided by sharp eyesight and keen hearing, a bobcat slips through the undergrowth, alert to even the smallest movement. A rustle in the leaves, a flick of motion in the grass, these are the signals it's been waiting for.

Unlike animals that rely on speed over distance, the bobcat is a patient hunter. It moves slowly, carefully closing the gap between itself and its prey before making a quick, powerful leap. Rabbits, mice, birds, and reptiles all make up part of its diet, depending on what is available. This steady hunting plays an important role in keeping nature in balance, helping to control populations of small animals and maintain the health of the ecosystem.

Everything about a bobcat is built for this life

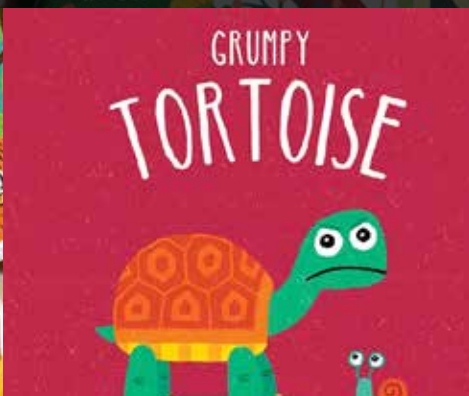
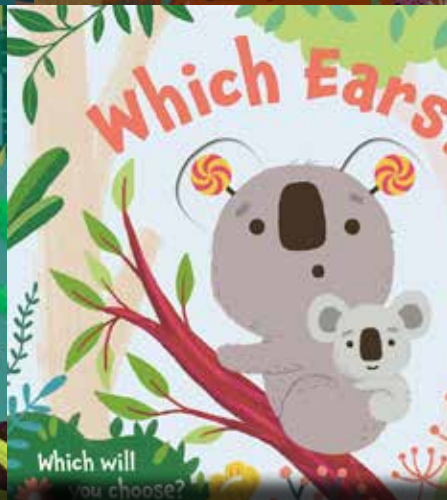
of quiet precision. Its padded paws soften each step, allowing it to move without sound. Strong back legs give it the power to spring forward in an instant. Even its coat, marked with spots and subtle striping, acts as natural camouflage, breaking up its outline so it melts into the landscape. In the dappled light of the forest—or the dim glow of the moon—it becomes nearly invisible.

And yet, despite their skill and strength, bobcats have little interest in people. They are naturally shy and prefer to avoid human activity whenever possible. If one happens to wander near a backyard or along the edge of a property, it is far more likely to slip away unnoticed than to stand its ground. For most of us, the only sign a bobcat has passed through might be a set of tracks in soft dirt or a fleeting glimpse of movement that's gone before we can be sure what we saw.

Sharing the landscape with bobcats is simply part of living in a place as wild and rich as East Texas. With a little awareness, keeping pet food indoors, bringing small pets inside at night, and respecting wildlife from a distance—people and bobcats can continue to coexist without issue. These animals are not looking for conflict; they are simply following ancient paths, moving through the same forests their kind has called home for generations.

Long after the last porch lights have been switched off and the roads have gone quiet, the Pineywoods remain alive with unseen movement. Somewhere beyond the reach of those lights, a bobcat continues its silent patrol, weaving through trees and shadows, as much a part of the night as the wind in the branches.

You may never see it. But knowing it's there makes the forest feel a little deeper, a little wilder... and just a bit more mysterious.



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