



Panthera pardus

Common name: **Leopard**Latin name: **Panthera pardus**

Local name: النمر



ECOLOGY

Type:

Wild

Role in Ecosystem:

Leopards compete for food with lions, tigers, spotted hyenas, and African wild dogs. To avoid attacks from potential predators, leopards tend to hunt at different times of the day and avoid areas where potential predators are most populous. When competition for larger prey items is high, leopards prey on smaller animals, which reduces interspecific competition.

HABITAT

Leopards occur in the widest range of habitats among any of the Old World Cats. They are most populous in mesic woodlands, grassland savannas, and forests. They also occupy mountainous, scrub, and desert habitats. They favour trees throughout their entire geographic distribution

Leopard home range size varies with prey availability and habitat structure.

Leopards are found throughout South Sudan with the exception of the Sudd wetland. The distribution of leopards has been severely reduced in North Sudan.



Food

Carnivore

Leopard diet is related to prey availability and presence of larger competitors. Generally, leopards prefer medium-sized ungulate prey (10- 40 kgs) where available. They have a highly varied diet, however, feeding on insects, reptiles, birds and small mammals up to large ungulates. Though the Leopard as a species has the reputation of being a generalist, often individuals will become adept specialists for a particular prey item. These individuals will feed almost exclusively on that prey, occasionally supplementing their diet with other food items when necessary. Where competitors are present, leopards will cache their kills under thick vegetation or hoist their prey into the limbs of a tree. Hoisting behaviour is more often recorded where intraguild competitors' density is higher. Male leopards tend to hoist more often than females, particularly in the dry season when available ground cover is scarce. In the absence of larger competitors, leopards feed on larger prey. In many parts of its range, the importance of domestic animals in their diet is also evident with dogs, goats and cattle forming a large proportion of their diet. Dogs have been reported as important prey for leopard.



Movement and Communication

Although leopards are silent most of the time, they may give a hoarse, rasping cough at repeated intervals to advertise their presence to conspecifics. Males use this unique call to announce territorial boundaries. If another leopard is in the vicinity, it may answer with a similar vocalization and continue vocalizing as it exits the area. Males also grunt at each other and females call to potential mates when in estrous. Some leopards may purr while feeding.



Social Habits

Solitary

Leopards are solitary, nocturnal carnivores. Although they sometimes hunt during overcast days, they are less diurnal in areas close to humans in comparison to uninhabited areas. They mark their territory with urine, feces, and claw marks and communicate with conspecifics by growling, roaring, and spitting when aggravated and purring when content. They also make a rasping cough to advertise their presence to conspecifics. Leopards are most comfortable in the lower forest canopy, where they often feed, and descend from the canopy head-first. They are comfortable in water and are adequate swimmers. When hunting, leopards move with a slow, crouching walk. They can run at bursts of up to 60 km/hour, jump more than 6 m horizontally and 3 m vertically. Leopards are facultative drinkers and obtain much of their water requirements from ingested prey. Leopard's have advanced vision and hearing, which makes them especially adept at hunting in dense forests.

Reproduction

Viviparous

Leopards usually breed only once a year but do not have a definite breeding season. Leopard females mate for the first time at the age of 2 to 2½ years. Males start breeding at the age of 1 ½ years. Females are in heat (estrus) for 5 – 13 days every 2 – 3 months. If a female's cubs die, she can come into heat within two weeks after their death. A female signals that she is in heat by rubbing her head against objects, rolling a lot and a sawing call. These cues attract the resident breeding male, who will pair up with her several days later. But if she successfully raises a litter, she comes into heat when the cubs are about 10 months old. After mating the pair rest under suitable cover and separate as soon as the next period of activity starts. Females give birth to cubs after a pregnancy of 88 – 112 days. Litter sizes range from 1 – 2 cubs (average of 1.5).

Attributes

Total length 1.6-2.7m

tail length 64-110cm

shoulder height 70-80cm

weight : female: 20-90kg, male :17-48kg.

INTRODUCTION

This is one of the most beautiful and elegant felines, which is unmistakable for its not overly large dimensions and its thickly spotted mantle of rosettes, which made its fur one of the most sought-after in the past. The rather short legs and the long tail help with their propensity for an arboreal life on the big trees of the savannah, where they habitually take prey to prevent it from being stolen by other carnivores, such as lions and spotted hyenas. They have one of the largest feline distribution areas (Africa and most of Asia), and being a very adaptable species, they have colonized a wide variety of environments with different climates, including semidesert areas, savannas, equatorial forests, mountains, deciduous forests, and Siberia's coniferous forests. Leopards are highly adaptable and widely distributed. They can persist in areas where other large carnivores have been extirpated. However, Leopards are declining throughout most of their range.

LIVELIHOODS AND CULTURE

Human interaction

Leopards are targeted for trophy hunting and are illegally hunted for wildlife trade for their skins (used in traditional ceremonies), and bones and other parts (used for medicinal purposes in eastern cultures).

Cultural value

Leopards have been seen as symbols of strength, power, and courage. Leopard skin has been worn by Kings and Sultans since the Kushite Kingdoms. It is also used to make "Nimir Markoobs" which are Sudanese hand-made leather shoes that reflect wealth and social position.

Cultural expression

The name "Nimir" is given to individuals in the belief that they will later carry the qualities of courage and strength which are symbolised by leopards.

El Mek Nimr, also known as Nimr Muhammad, (c. 1785 to 1846) was the last Mek (shaihk or head) of the Ja'alin tribe in Sudan.

A street and a bridge in Khartoum the capital of Sudan, are named after this leader.

"Taha Wad Dakeen" narrates, in a traditional poem, a famous incident between the **Al-Bataheen** and **Al-Shukriya** tribes, in which he mentions leopards (Numoor).

THREATS

Panthera pardus is listed as Vulnerable. The primary threats to leopards are human. Habitat fragmentation, reduced prey base and conflict with livestock and game farming have reduced leopard populations throughout most of their range. The conversion of forest habitats and savanna systems to agriculture, livestock farming and urban sprawl have significantly reduced leopard ranges. Though exceptions exist, this conversion typically leads to the depletion of natural prey species through poaching, thereby reducing the natural prey base in these areas.

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