



Jaguar

Fast Facts



Common Name: Jaguar

Scientific Name: *Panthera onca*

Family: Felidae

Order: Carnivora

Class: Mammalia

Range: Central and South America



Habitat: Rainforests, temperate forests, wetlands, grasslands

Lifespan: 12-15 years in the wild;
up to 23 years in captivity

Conservation Status: Near
Threatened



What do they look like?

Jaguars are the largest cat species found in the Americas. Their size is variable depending on their habitat; forest-dwelling cats are smaller than their grass- or wetlands counterparts. Jaguars found in southern regions are also typically larger than those found in the north. They weigh 80-350lbs, although they are typically between 100-250lbs, with males being larger than females. They are 5.5-6 feet long and 26-30 inches tall at the shoulders. They are typically tawny-colored and blanketed with black rosettes. *Melanism*, or black coloration, occurs in this species (as well as in leopards) resulting in a black jaguar, also known as a black panther.

How do they behave?

Like most large cats, jaguars are solitary animals. Mature jaguars only interact to mate or dispute territory. They are the only species in the genus *Panthera* (big cats with the ability to roar) in the Americas, though their roar often resembles a cough or grunt. Jaguars are most active during dawn, dusk, and at night. Jaguars are “stalk-and-ambush” hunters and are able to capture prey up to twice their size. Studies have shown their bite is the strongest of all felines when compared to their size. Their stocky structure makes them skilled at climbing, crawling, and swimming.

What's on the menu?

Jaguars are obligate carnivores. In the wild, they have an extensive list of prey including but not limited to capybaras, tapirs, peccaries, armadillos, monkeys, birds, snakes, caiman, turtles and fish. At the Zoo, they are fed meat, rodents, and bones.

How are they born?

Jaguars are able to breed year-round. Courting is brief, and the male and female separate after mating. Gestation lasts 93-105 days and results in a litter of up to four cubs, though twins are most common. Cubs are born blind and helpless, reliant on their mother's care for survival. They will stay in the den for up to six months before joining their mother on hunts to learn to catch prey. They will stay with their mother for up to two years before establishing their own territory and will reach sexual maturity around three years of age.

What should you know about them?

Jaguars are considered an *apex predator* and a *keystone species*. As a top predator and keystone species, jaguars play a crucial role in the ecosystem. Without the jaguar, herbivorous prey animals would decimate the plants of their ecosystem. Though few in numbers, jaguars prevent the ecosystem from collapsing.

What can you do to help?

Jaguar populations are continuing to decline due to habitat loss and human interaction. They are often persecuted for hunting livestock when their territories overlap with humans. Though their numbers continue to decline, trophy hunting is still allowed in some countries. Jaguars are not in danger of immediate extinction. However, education and conservation are crucial to the species' survival. To prevent habitat destruction, you can help by buying wood that is sustainably harvested, coffee that is shade grown, and locally grown. These products do not require the destruction of rainforest land to grow crops.