

Name: _____

The Beautiful, Powerful Jaguar

By Guy Belleranti



What beautiful cat lives in North and South America and is bigger and tougher than a leopard or mountain lion? If you said jaguar, you're right. The only cat species that are larger are the tiger, the African lion, and the very endangered Asiatic lion.

Most jaguars are orange or tan with black rose-shaped spots (rosettes). However, there is also a solid black jaguar. Black jaguars have spots, too, but their spots are hard to see except when in bright sunlight.

The jaguar's coloration serves as camouflage. Lighter-colored jaguars live in more open grassland and forest. Here, their markings help them blend in among the vegetation and shadows. Black jaguars, meanwhile, blend in better in the darkest forests and jungles.

Like tigers, jaguars live alone most of their lives. Baby jaguars are born in litters of one to four and stay with their very protective mother for two years while they learn to hunt. Then they leave to establish their own territory, marking it with their waste or by clawing marks in trees.

Also like tigers, jaguars love water. They'll sit half-submerged in a cool rainforest stream or pond waiting for prey. Sometimes jaguars will even climb trees to await unsuspecting prey wandering below.

They'll catch water animals like caiman (a relative of alligators and crocodiles), fish, frogs, and turtles. Other times, they'll hunt on land. They'll pounce on tapir, peccaries, capybara, or deer with one quick leap.

A jaguar's bite is so strong, it can even chomp through tortoise shells. They've even been observed using their jaws to drag heavy prey for over a mile.



People often confuse leopards with jaguars. Both are beautiful, spotted cats. However, there are several important differences. Leopards live in Asia and Africa, while jaguars are native to the Americas. Also, jaguars are much bigger. They have heavier chests and legs, and their larger heads have more powerful jaws.

While jaguars were once fairly abundant, they are currently endangered. Mining, farming, and other development have destroyed much of their wild habitat. Today some of their habitat is protected.

However, these beautiful cats are still illegally hunted for their fur and because they are a threat to ranchers' livestock.

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1. How long do baby jaguars stay with their mothers before going off on their own?
 - a. 1 year
 - b. 2 years
 - c. 3 years
 - d. 4 years

2. How are jaguars and leopards different?

3. Which cat species is smaller than a jaguar?

- a. African lion
- b. Asiatic lion
- c. tiger
- d. mountain lion

4. What has caused jaguars to become endangered?

5. Which statement is *not* true?

- a. Jaguars can climb trees.
- b. Jaguars can sometimes be found in streams or ponds.
- c. Jaguars live in large groups throughout most of their lives.
- d. Jaguars have stronger jaws than most other animals.

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____

o c u e s f n

hint: mix up

2. _____

m u a f c l o e g a

hint: ability to blend in

3. _____

d u n a n b t a

hint: common; in great number

4. _____

a h t a t b i

hint: place where an animal lives

5. _____

y a i l l e l l g

hint: doing something against the law

6. _____

f a i l b e u t u

hint: antonym for ugly

7. _____

r e l s i t t

hint: groups of baby cats that are born at the same time

ANSWER KEY

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1. How long do baby jaguars stay with their mothers before going off on their own?
 - a. 1 year
 - b. 2 years**
 - c. 3 years
 - d. 4 years

2. How are jaguars and leopards different?

Jaguars live in North and South America. Leopards live in

Africa and Asia. Jaguars are larger than leopards, have

heavier chests, legs, and heads, and have more powerful jaws.

3. Which cat species is smaller than a jaguar?

- a. African lion
- b. Asiatic lion
- c. tiger
- d. mountain lion**

4. What has caused jaguars to become endangered?

Mining, farming, and development have destroyed their habitat.

They are also illegally hunted by poachers and ranchers.

5. Which statement is *not* true?

- a. Jaguars can climb trees.
- b. Jaguars can sometimes be found in streams or ponds.
- c. Jaguars live in large groups throughout most of their lives.**
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ANSWER KEY

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. **confuse**

o c u e s f n

hint: mix up

2. **camouflage**

m u a f c l o e g a

hint: ability to blend in

3. **abundant**

d u n a n b t a

hint: common; in great number

4. **habitat**

a h t a t b i

hint: place where an animal lives

5. **illegally**

y a i l l e l l g

hint: doing something against the law

6. **beautiful**

f a i l b e u t u

hint: antonym for ugly

7. **litters**

r e l s i t t

hint: groups of baby cats that are born at the same time