Did you know...?
Leopards may loathe scavengers, but they're not above doing it themselves if times are hard, stealing kills from cheetahs, lone hyenas and other small carnivores.

Powerful PROWLER

Leopards may be the smallest of the so-called 'big cats' – a term that includes lions, tigers and jaguars – but they're amazingly strong for their size. They have muscular necks and stocky legs made for pouncing and climbing, and their massive heads pack powerful jaws. One scientist saw a leopard take down an animal 12 times its weight – that's like a man stopping a car by leaping on it!

Yet despite all that power, leopards are masters of stealth. They stalk with the grace of a much smaller cat, tiptoeing on the pads of their paws and creeping ghostlike through the brush until they're close enough to pounce on prey. The cats' spotted fur blends with trees, grass and shadows, making them nearly invisible. And as they're able to see well in the dark, leopards can even hunt at night.

Dark CATS

Not all leopards are born with tawny spotted coats – some are all black. People sometimes call these dark-furred leopards 'black panthers'. Black leopards can be born in the same litter as normal-coloured leopards. If you look closely, you'll even see that black leopards have spots – they're just very dark.

A 'black panther' is actually a leopard in a dark disguise!

Leopard is near Kruger Park, South Africa. Leopard cubs, Wildlife/Nature Photographer (© Ben Newman) / Super-black Leopard (© Jason Leopard Lull Beverly Joan Photo) / National Geographic Stock, Snow leopard, Kazakhstan in winter - Getty Images

The leopard's spot patterns, like human fingerprints, are different for every animal and can be used to help identify them.

Adaptable FELINE

Not all leopards spend their lives in trees. In areas without scavengers or large predators, the cats are happy hiding their dinners in the brush. This ability to adapt – including slight differences in coat colour to match their surrounding terrain – has helped the leopard become the most widespread member of the cat species. However, the amur leopard of Far East Russia and Northern China is the most endangered of all the big cats.

Leopards can be found throughout most of the southern half of Africa and across much of Asia, from dense jungles and snowy mountains to huge grasslands called savannas.

Perhaps the biggest reason the leopards' success is that they're not picky eaters. The cats adapt their diet to whatever prey is plentiful. They'll go after crocodiles, zebras and other big animals. But the size of their prey varies a lot – rodents, hares, lizards… no meal's too small for this cat!

Leopards are patient, stealthy hunters, stalking prey unseen, thanks to their clever camouflage

Leopards can swim well if they need to, and sometimes they even seem to be having fun playing in water. But they don't like getting wet nearly as much as tigers do – they *lap* it up!

Sometimes cats and water do mix!

The white tail shows cubs where mum is

Scientists think that the white on the underside of a leopard's tail may help cubs following their mum keep her in sight.

There are almost 30 different species of leopard, including the snow leopard that lives in the mountains of Central Asia. Strangely, this cat can't roar!

Sadly, the beautiful snow leopard is endangered