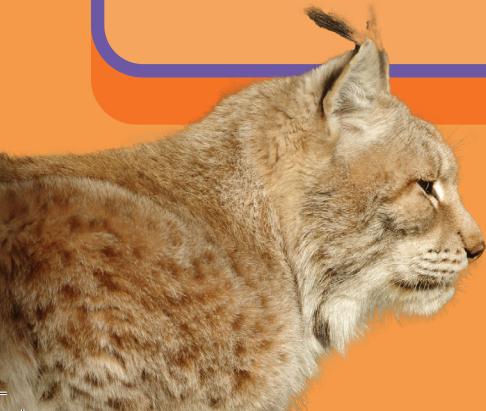




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Whiskered Wonders

India has the highest number of wild cat species in the world – 15! Wild cats occupy an important place in Indian culture. Whether it is in the national emblem (the Asiatic lion) or as the national animal (the Bengal tiger), the wild cats of India have commanded our respect for centuries. These remarkably adaptable felines are found across the country – from the snowy mountains of the Himalayas to the dense jungles of southern India, from the scorching Thar Desert to the unexplored caves of Northeast India.





Why Are Wild Cats Important?

Wild cats are the top predators in the food chain. They keep herbivore populations in check. Did you know that the mere presence of a wild cat prevents herbivores from staying in a place for too long and eating up all the plants? If wild cats are absent from an area, animals like deer, cattle and even small rodents like mice can overgraze and slow the growth of a forest or a grassland. Wild cats are the class monitors who maintain order in their habitats.

The high reaches of the Himalayas are home to the snow leopard





How Do Wild Cats Hunt?

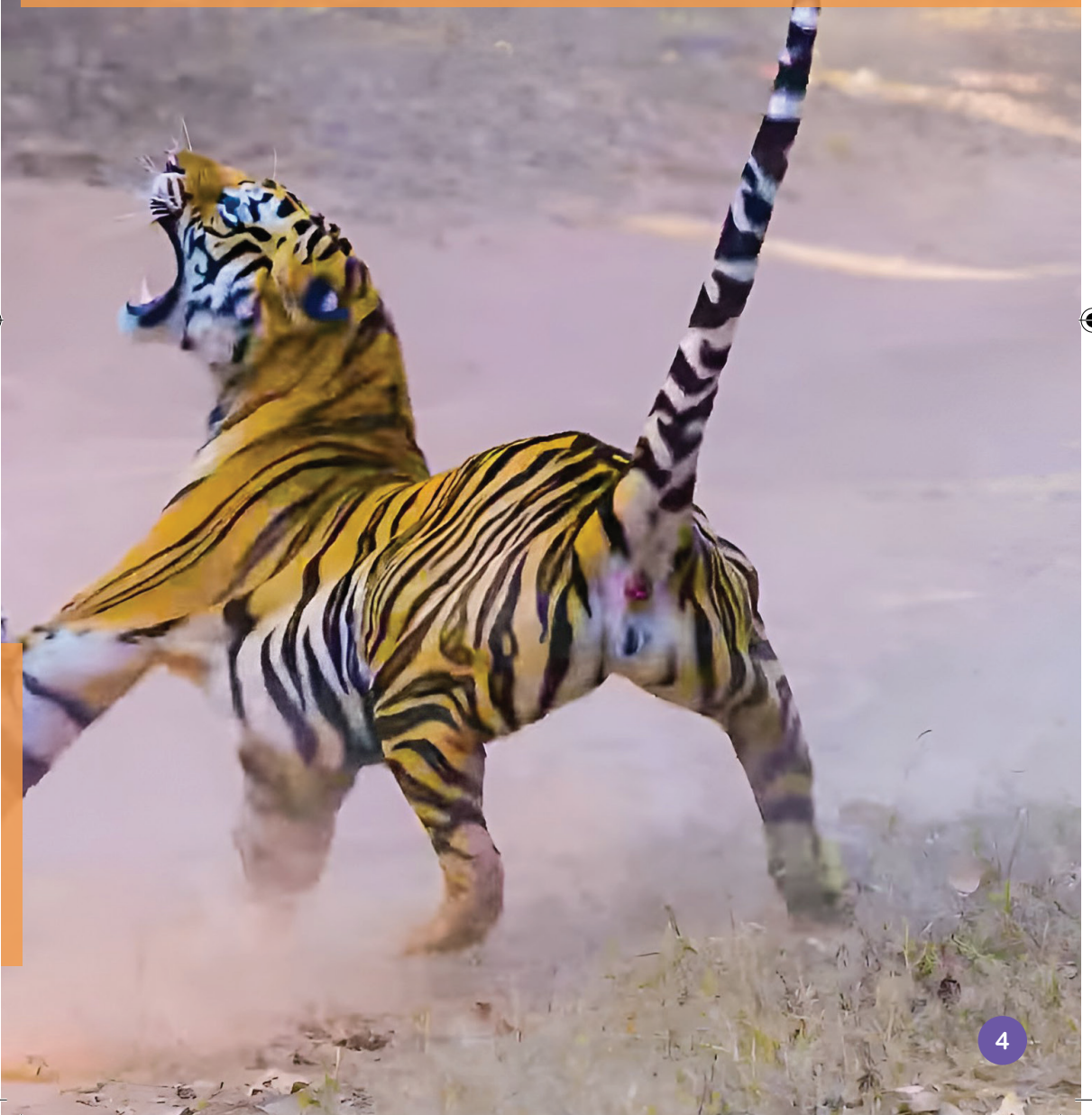
All felines are carnivores. Wild cats have powerful jaws that crush bones, sharp claws that tear apart flesh and powerful limbs that help catch prey. All wild cats are ambush predators but their tactics may differ – tigers and leopards patiently wait to ambush their prey, while others like lions and caracals stalk their prey over long distances. Most are nocturnal hunters, which means they hunt at night, using their superb eyesight.





Do Wild Cats Live in Groups or Alone?

Lions are the only wild cats in India which live together in groups. All others are generally solitary, coming together only during breeding season. Some wild cats may babysit their siblings and relatives, but this is rare. These solitary animals fiercely defend their territories to protect food sources and mates. Wild cats mark their territories by spraying certain trees or rocks with their urine, scratching on tree bark with their sharp claws or emitting growls and roars.





How Are Wild Cats Different From Pet Cats?

Domestic cats have been around humans for at least 12,000 years and are used to human touch and presence. Despite many wild cats looking like domestic cats, they do not like to be around humans and find us a threat! Wild cats require large territories to hunt, breed and feel safe. Keeping wild cats as pets is a cruel practice that makes them unhappy and aggressive.





Royal Bengal Tiger

Find Me Here!

Popular places to spot them are Ranthambore National Park and Jim Corbett National Park.

CRITTER STATS

Scientific name: *Panthera tigris*

Size: 255–311 cm – bigger than a Royal Enfield bike!

Weight: 135–225 kg

Lifespan: 14–20 years

Habitat: forests, grasslands, mangrove swamps

Conservation status: endangered



The Royal Bengal tiger, India's national animal, is the largest and most iconic wild cat in India. The tiger is so important to the health of India's wildlife and forests that we created special areas to protect them, called tiger reserves.



The largest of India's wild cats, tigers evolved to be so big because of their preference for large prey such as sambar deer and gaur! If large prey are not available, they may even eat fish or smaller animals such as goats.

Like your fingerprints, each tiger's stripes are unique. They also act as camouflage. In forests and grasslands, the stripes blend in with shadows and sunlight. And since deer are colour-blind to orange, the tiger is almost invisible to them!





Not all hunts are successful. But when the tiger does succeed, escape is near-impossible. After stalking its prey, the cat will pounce in one powerful strike, enough to break the prey's spine.

Bengal tigers don't come in only orange and black! There are also white tigers, golden tigers and black tigers or pseudo-melanistic tigers.

These rare colours occur because of changes in genes, which are the building blocks of life present in the body's cells.





DID YOU KNOW?

Killing machines: Bengal tigers have the largest canines in the cat family at 3 inches long! This allows them to efficiently kill by chomping down on the prey's throat.



The Bengal tiger is found in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and south-western China. India has the largest population of Bengal tigers at around 3,600!



Roaring success: a tiger's roar can be heard over 3 km away! Tigers usually roar to warn other tigers against entering their territory.

