

# Florida Panther Facts

## Description and Biology

- 🐾 Adult Florida panthers have tawny-colored fur on their backs; white fur on their chest, belly and inner legs; and black coloring on the tip of their tail, the back of their ears, and on parts of the face. Panthers have a long tail.
- 🐾 There is no such thing as a black panther. A Florida panther can appear black in dim light or if wet.



© Photo by LARRY RICHARDSON

- 🐾 Florida Panthers are part of the puma family and are called cougars, mountain lions and pumas depending on where they live. Florida panthers (*Puma concolor coryi*) live in southern Florida swamplands between Miami and Naples. They are the last surviving puma subspecies left in eastern North America.
- 🐾 Panthers are about 7 or 8 feet long. The average weight for males is about 120 pounds, while the average weight for females is 75 pounds.
- 🐾 Florida panthers are most active at dawn and dusk and also during the night.
- 🐾 Shy and reclusive, there has never been a documented Florida panther attack of a human. If you encounter a panther, follow these tips: <http://myfwc.com/media/152454/LivingWithPanthers.pdf>.
- 🐾 Florida panthers do not roar, but can make many different sounds to communicate, including purrs, whistles, mews, chirps, hisses, growls, and even screams. The panther's scream is called a caterwaul.

- 🐾 Panthers can live to about twelve years old in the wild.

Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/history/>

### Diet

- 🐾 Florida panthers stalk and ambush their prey. Panthers can leap distances of more than 15 feet.
- 🐾 The panther's primary prey are white-tailed deer and wild hogs. They also eat raccoons, armadillo, rabbit, and other animals birds and alligators.

Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/history/>

### Kittens

- 🐾 Kittens weigh about a pound and are born with a spotted coat which helps camouflage them in the den.
- 🐾 Most den sites are made from dense saw palmetto, shrubs, or vines.
- 🐾 Their bright blue eyes are closed at birth until about 3 weeks of age.
- 🐾 Most births occur in late spring when food sources for mom are the most plentiful.
- 🐾 In the dark thicket of the den, kittens sleep, play, and practice their leaping and pouncing – skills they will need when they learn to hunt.
- 🐾 Panther young stay with their mother for 1 ½ to 2 years. By then, their spots have faded away and eyes turn an adult's golden color.





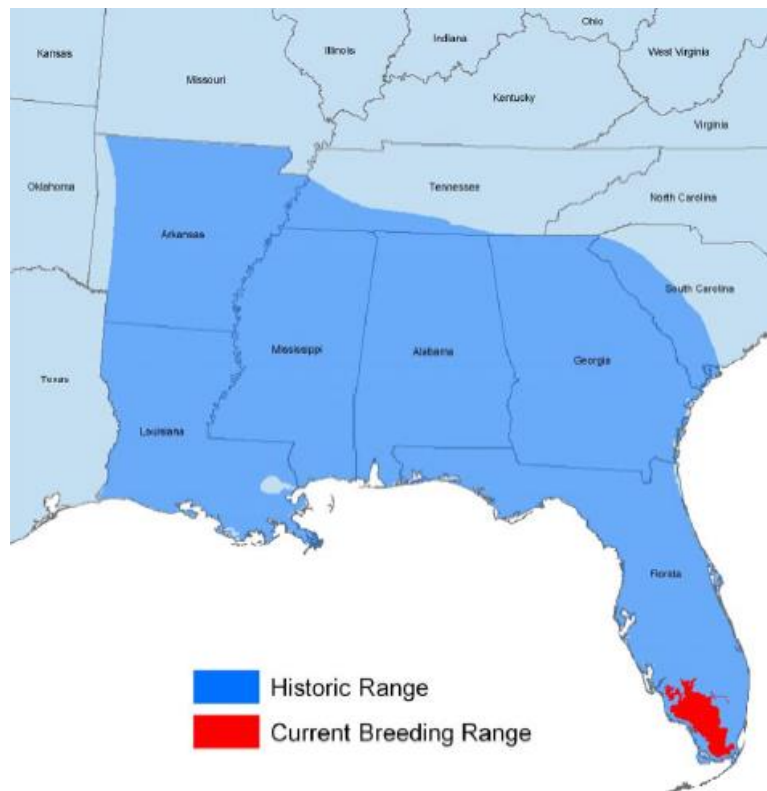
Courtesy Florida Wildlife Commission Mark Lotz

Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/history/>

### Range and Habitat Preferences

- 🐾 Panthers once roamed throughout the Southeastern states, but today they are only found primarily in Southern Florida.
- 🐾 Panthers maintain very large home ranges, sometimes over 200 square miles. These ranges can overlap, but panthers tend to avoid one another. Panthers are solitary and found together only when mating or when the mothers raise their young.
- 🐾 Territorial behavior can lead to one panther killing another which is called intraspecific aggression.



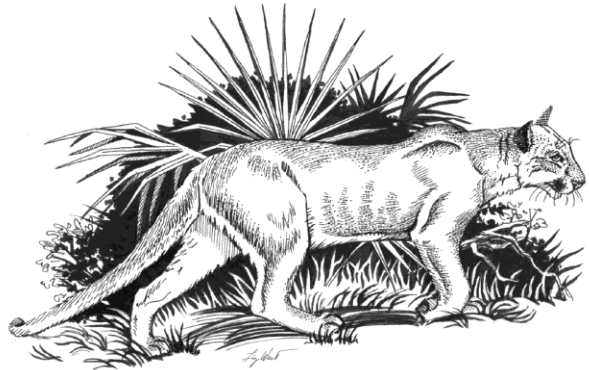
- 🐾 Sometimes males searching for mates and new territory have been documented north of the Caloosahatchee River, even as far north as Orlando and South Georgia.
- 🐾 However, due to human development, no female panthers have been found north of the Caloosahatchee River in more than thirty years. If you see a panther, register your sighting at:  
<https://public.myfwc.com/hsc/PantherSightings/getlatlong.aspx>
- 🐾 Panthers prefer habitat with lots of cover, like hardwood and oak hammocks, cypress swamps, and pine flatwoods. However, they are known to also use agricultural lands such as open pasture in pursuit of prey or for other needs.

Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/history/> and  
<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/habitat/>

### Endangered Status

- 🐾 The Florida panther is one of the most endangered mammals in the United States. Only an estimated 100-160 Florida panthers remain in the wild.
- 🐾 The Florida panther has been protected since 1967 and was listed when the Endangered Species Act was first passed in 1973.
- 🐾 In the early 1990's, the panther population was less than 50. Too few panthers were resulting in genetic defects that made reproduction difficult and diseased the health of the population. To restore the gene pool of the Florida panther, eight female Texas pumas were relocated for a few years to south Florida. The offspring are considered to be Florida panthers.
- 🐾 The population needs to be increased to sustain this species. In order to fully recover the Florida panther, three populations of at least 240 cats are needed. Read the Florida Panther Recovery Plan here:  
<http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/ListedSpeciesMammals.html#fp>



Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/threats/>

### Threats

- 🐾 The biggest threat to panthers is loss of habitat. As habitat disappears due to human development, the cats are squeezed into smaller areas, increasing the occurrence of territorial fights or being hit by cars.
- 🐾 Habitat protection, therefore, is the most needed thing to protect the Florida panther.
- 🐾 Additionally, wildlife corridors and underpasses on roadways are needed to protect panthers as they attempt to get from one place to another.
- 🐾 By protecting habitat for the Florida panther, we protect habitat and water quality for the entire ecosystem. Because of its connection to the survival of other species, the panther is often called an “umbrella species.”
- 🐾 The health of South Florida’s ecosystem is dependent on the survival of this top predator. What you can do to help panthers:  
<http://myfwc.com/conservation/you-serve/wildlife/panthers/>

Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/threats/>

### Research

- 🐾 Biologists started studying panthers in 1981 with radio-collars to track them. They also use trip cameras which are mounted on trees and take a picture when the panther goes by.
- 🐾 This research documented their preferred habitats, home range, dispersal, birth rates, and causes of death.
- 🐾 When a radio-collared female panther stays in one spot for a long time, she may have kittens in a den. The biologists try to locate the den and check on their health.

Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/index.php/handbook/conservation/>

## Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and its Importance to Panthers

- 🐾 The Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge protects over 26,400 acres of panther habitat in Collier County, Florida.
- 🐾 It was established in 1989 under the Endangered Species Act for the purpose of protecting the Florida panther and important habitat.
- 🐾 Female panthers routinely den and raise kittens on the Refuge.
- 🐾 Recent camera study showed that the Refuge routinely supports between 5 and 11 panthers.



Additional information can also be found here:

<http://www.floridapanther.net.org/>

<http://www.fws.gov/verobeach/ListedSpeciesMammals.html#fp>

<http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/profile/speciesProfile.action?spcode=A008>