

Name: _____

Cat in Danger

By Guy Belleranti

Florida's official state animal is the Florida panther. It is a greatly endangered United States mammal.

Florida panthers are one of several subspecies of puma. Pumas are known by many names depending on where they live. Mountain lion, cougar, and panther are some of these names. The Florida panther is the only puma living east of the Mississippi River.



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They also wouldn't be satisfied with kibble and a can of tuna. These carnivores are most active between dusk and dawn. Their prey includes larger animals like deer and feral hogs. They also hunt raccoons, rabbits, rodents, birds, and reptiles, including small alligators.



Mothers have litters of one to three kittens. The kittens are covered with dark spots. The spots help the kittens blend in with vegetation and shadows in the forest. As the kittens grow, the spots fade. After 1½ to 2 years they are ready to live on their own.

At one time Florida panthers lived in many woodlands and swamp

forests of the Gulf coast and Southeastern United States. But hunting and habitat loss to human activities greatly reduced their numbers.



Florida panther kittens have spots to help them

Finally, in 1973, the Florida panther was put on the U.S. endangered species list. Today, most live in a few southern Florida protected areas. Big Cypress National Preserve and the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge are two of them.

Saving these cats will be difficult. Expanding human cities



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1. What is one way you can tell a Florida panther from another subspecies of puma just by looking?

2. Which of the following is true about Florida panthers?



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- a. plants b. water c. animals d. sand

4. Which of the following is not considered a threat to Florida panthers?

- a. exposure to diseases from domestic animals
- b. deadly attacks from domestic animals
- c. collisions with vehicles
- d. habitat loss

5. The article says that breaking up the Florida panthers' territory is a threat. What is one reason that breaking up territory might have a bad impact on them?

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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. _____ u b i p e s e c s s
clue: distinct populations within the same species

2. _____ e r l a f



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clue: ability to endure without major change

6. _____ s r a o i t y l
clue: being or living alone

7. _____ e s v i i l b
clue: able to be seen

8. _____ e d n r e a g e d n
clue: at risk of going extinct

9. _____ e o c o r d k
clue: bent or twisted out of shape; not straight

10. _____ r l t o a e r i r i t
clue: keeping to and being defensive of one's own space

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In the article, "Cat in Danger," you learned about a keystone species and the threats facing it.

Conservationists fight to protect many keystone animal species. Others include gray wolves, sea otters, beavers, and bees. Pick one of these or another important keystone species and research it using the internet. What role(s) does it play in its ecosystem? What impact might its extinction have? What are one or two threats it faces? On the back of this page, write the address for the website(s) you use for your research.



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ANSWER KEY

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1. What is one way you can tell a Florida panther from another subspecies of puma just by looking?



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Answers will vary. An example is: Breaking up territory could mean panthers have to cross more roads, which is dangerous.

// Breaking up territory means it is harder for panthers to find each other to breed.

ANSWER KEY

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it



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9. crooked

e o c o r d k

clue: bent or twisted out of shape; not straight

10. territorial

r l t o a e r i r i t

clue: keeping to and being defensive of one's own space