The largest meat-eating animal in South America is the jaguar. This big cat is difficult to observe, so scientists do not know much about its habits. They do know that it usually lives at the edge of the forest and hides in tall grass. A good climber and excellent swimmer, it can cross the large rivers that pass through the Amazon forest. The forests where it usually lives have been cut or burned in recent years. Also, until it was protected, people hunted it for its beautiful fur. As a result, it is now endangered.

The hunting technique of the jaguar consists of chasing a herd until it catches an animal that tires out and falls behind. The jaguar also hunts by stalking its prey. It is a powerful animal: It can kill a cow or a horse and drag it dozens of yards. It eats a variety of food: capybaras, which are large rodents; peccaries, which are like wild pigs; monkeys; and even crocodiles. The jaguar also eats fish. It sits on a branch over the water, waits for a fish to swim by, and grabs it out of the water with its powerful jaws.

A jaguar fiercely defends its territory and its prey once it has killed it. That is why it sometimes attacks humans who come too close. Except for man, the jaguar has no enemies. Jaguars generally mate in the fall. Young are born only every other year. They start to eat meat when they are 7 weeks old. The cubs stay with their mother for 2 years and become adults when they are 3 or 4.
Leopard
Felis pardus

Class: Mammals
Order: Carnivores
Family: Cats
Length: 3 to 5 feet
Height at Shoulder: up to 28 inches
Weight: 65 to 175 pounds
Diet: carnivorous
Number of Young: 2 to 4
Home: Africa and Asia

At dusk, as darkness begins to cover the land, the leopard arises from a nap and begins to hunt. Its long, graceful body moves quietly. Sharp eyes and an excellent sense of smell quickly alert the leopard to the presence of prey. When the leopard gets within striking distance, it uses its strong back and leg muscles to jump onto the prey. Leopards catch mostly hoofed animals such as deer and antelope. They also capture baboons, monkeys, rodents, and birds. Leopards that live near farms often snare domesticated animals, including dogs. Leopards are excellent tree climbers. Sometimes a leopard will pull the remains of its prey up into a tree. This keeps the remains safe from hyenas and other hungry scavengers.

Most leopards live alone. The cubs stay with their mother for the first six months of their lives. At first the mother hides the young among rocks or bushes when she goes hunting. When the cubs are about two months old, they begin to follow their mother around.

Leopards live in many different habitats. Those that live in dry, treeless areas usually have pale-colored fur. Forest leopards have dark coats covered with big black spots. Some leopards have black fur and are called black panthers. Leopards are threatened with extinction because people have destroyed their habitats and hunted them for their fur.