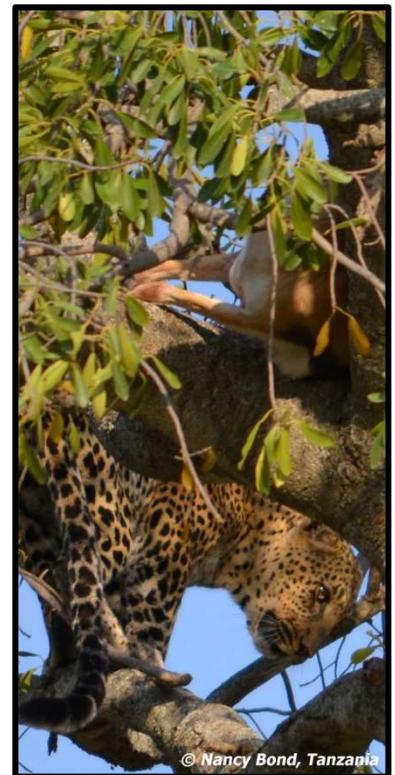
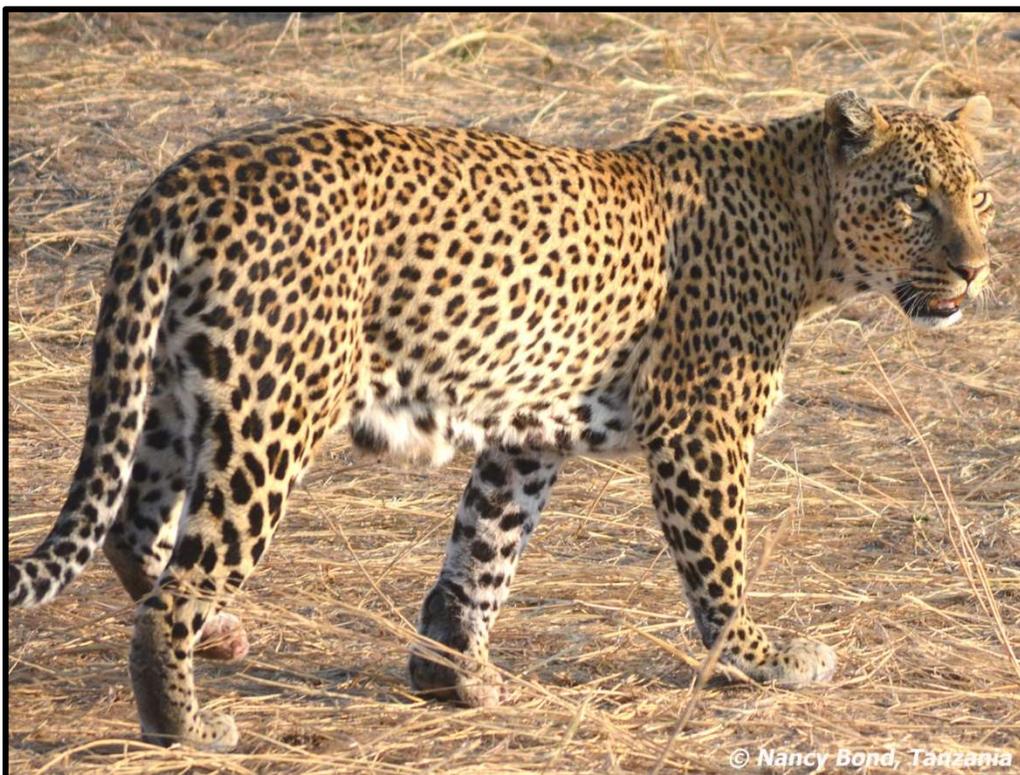


Leopards

- Leopards live an average of 12-15 years in the wild. *(21-23 years in captivity.)*
- Males weigh from 80 - 175 pounds and females weigh between 60 – 110 pounds.
- They stand 2 to 2.5 feet in height at their shoulder.
- Leopards vary in length from 3 to 6.25 feet with a tail of 22.5 to 43 inches.
- This golden cat has short powerful limbs, heavy torso, thick neck and a long tail.
- Leopards are spotted with black and brown rosettes that are actually a cluster of 4 or 5 smaller spots. Varying sized spots occur all over the body, on the toes, tail, except on the inner sides of the ears or the top of the nose. Around the head the spots are small and numerous – single black dots.
- A leopard's coat is soft and silky, being a yellowish tawny on the back, shading to white on the belly.
- Their eyes are yellowish green with round pupils that remain circles at all sizes.
- The whiskers are useful as organs of touch to determine the precise locations of twigs and leaves. Whiskers and eyebrow hairs help avoid large thorns in trees.
- **A leopard's tail dangles and would drag the ground if it were not held up.** It is endlessly expressive.
- Leopards can run up to 40 mph and leap nearly 20 feet forward through the air.
- They are **solitary, secretive, silent and smooth loners** who only meet with other leopards for mating. Moms raise their cubs in solitude.
- Of all the cats, leopards are the **most skilled and fastest climbers**. They are very comfortable in trees and descend head first.
- When on safari, to find leopards – “Look for tails hanging down in trees.”
- They often live on kopjes (*pronounced copies*) which are huge rocks and rock formations jutting out of the plains.
- Each leopard has his/her own territory designated by scratches on trees, urine scent marks and poop to warn other leopards to stay away.
- Leopards are arguably **the most accomplished stalkers of all the cats**.
- When leopards are on the move, baboons and vervet monkeys scatter through the tops of trees barking and protesting to let other animals know.
- Being carnivorous, leopards eat ungulates, or hooved animals, such as antelope and gazelle. They are not picky and will take an easy, opportunistic meal such as rodents and rabbits.
- They are ambush predators. Leopards will stalk with legs bent and head low, so as not to be seen. Then, they surprise their prey by pouncing on it, and killing it with a quick bite to the neck.
- As skilled hunters, they can take down an animal three times their size. Often, leopards carry the kill up into a tree for safekeeping from hyenas or lions who will steal their meal. *(Stealing meals is called kleptoparasitism.)*
- As with other animals, leopards will avoid a fight because serious wounds impair hunting ability and bring death by infection or starvation.
- Pound for pound, the leopard ranks as one of the most powerful animals on earth.
- Leopards keep down populations such as baboons that raid village farms.

- Leopards are known for being nocturnal. However, they can also be crepuscular - *most active at dawn and dusk*. And actually, they are often seen hunting during the day – maybe to avoid the view of hyenas or because they are opportunist.
- Female leopards typically begin giving birth around 2 to 3 years of age.
- The gestation period for a litter is 90 to 105 days and a litter usually consists of 2 to 4 grayish cubs with barely visible spots. The mortality rate of cubs is 40-50%.
- Moms find a cave or dense thicket for a den to give birth and raise the cubs. When she hunts, she leaves the cubs vulnerable to lions and hyenas.
- The cubs will stay with their mother for about 2 years.
- Leopards communicate with each other through distinctive calls. When a male leopard wants to make another leopard aware of his presence, he'll make a hoarse, raspy cough. They also growl when angry and "purr" when happy and relaxed. *(Technically purring is done when breathing in and out. A leopard's purr is only when exhaling – like all big cats that can roar – it's not technically a purr – but does sound like a purr to me.)*
- Leopards are excellent swimmers.
- Leopards are classified as "vulnerable" on the IUCN Red List. This is due to poaching and habitat loss. The ability of the leopard to adapt to many environments has allowed its numbers to, so far, stay steady in spite of these threats.
- Leopards' greatest predators are humans.
- Leopards are hunted for their soft fur to use in making coats (*takes 7 leopards*) or ceremonial robes or decor. Also, their claws, whisker and tails are sought after for phony medicinal reasons.
- They will steal chicken, goats, and sheep when in close proximity to people's homes and villages. Obviously, this makes people angry and then they either hunt or poison the leopards.



Find more leopard pictures and information about the other animals in this play at: www.theater4church.com/Animals.htm