Black Panther

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black panther, colloquial term used to refer to large felines classified in the genus *Panthera* that are characterized by a coat of black fur or large concentrations of black spots set against a dark background. The term *black panther* is most frequently applied to black-coated leopards (*Panthera pardus*) of Africa and Asia and jaguars (*P. onca*) of Central and South America; black-furred variants of these species are also called *black leopards* and *black jaguars*, respectively. In addition, the term is sometimes used to describe dark-coloured bobcats, lynx, jaguarundis, tigers, and pumas (cougars), even though reports of black-coloured representatives of some species, such as the puma, have not been confirmed.

Black coat coloration is attributed to the expression of recessive alleles in leopards and dominant alleles in jaguars. In each species, a certain combination of alleles stimulates the

production of large amounts of the dark pigment melanin in the animal's fur and skin. Although melanin concentrations often vary between members of the same litter, individuals displaying completely black coats are rare.

The appearance of a black coat may be influenced by other factors, such as the angle of incident light and the animal's life stage. For example, some melanistic leopards and jaguars display totally black coats, because the finer details of their fur may be masked by diffuse light. In full sunlight, however, the faint spotted pattern of the coat may emerge. Also, blackened or near-blackened coats may result from the retention of black spots from the juvenile stage, which may complement other concentrations of dark-coloured fur, into adulthood. In other species, such as lynx (*Lynx*), the appearance of black or near-black fur might also be explained by seasonal colour changes.

Melanistic leopards and jaguars are uncommon, with some studies estimating that at most 11 percent of these animals have this coloration. Confirmed sightings, however, are less frequent, and confirmed sightings of black leopards, especially in Africa, are rare events. Before the most recent verified observation of a black leopard took place in Kenya in 2019, it had been 110 years since it had been photographed (and thus confirmed) in Africa.