

CATS! WILD TO MILD

CURRICULUM GUIDE OVERVIEW



Exhibition Overview:

Cats! Wild to Mild explores wild and domestic cats biologically, behaviorally, and environmentally. The similarities between domestic cats and wild cats is a major theme carried throughout the exhibit. In addition, the exhibition illuminates a wide variety of human-feline interactions, including the ancient Egyptian worship and domestication of cats, the importance of felines to Pre-Columbian cultures of the Americas, the economic value of wild cats in fur trading and folk medicine, the utility of farm cats, and the pleasure of show cats. As an indirect result of human interaction with felines through time, the populations of many wild species of cats are threatened and domestic cats have become grossly overpopulated in urban regions.

Most people in the United States live in urban areas and have little or no contact with wild animals. Nor do many people in our society have a solid understanding of animal biology, animal behavior, or proper animal care. This is especially true in inner city neighborhoods, where caring for pets proves difficult or impossible in a crowded living environment. One animal that continues to be familiar to urban dwellers, however, is the domestic cat (*Felis catus*). Domestic cats are now the most popular pet in the United States. Having both wild and domestic present-day members in their family (*Felidae*), cats offer a bridge from the familiar to the exotic and an opportunity to explore a broad range of biological, behavioral, and cultural issues. This bridge between domestic cats and wild cats is the operational tool used throughout the exhibit to teach students basic biological concepts.

Habitat loss due to human settlement, the economics of the fur trade, Asian medicinal practices, genetic inbreeding, and dangerously small numbers of some *Felidae* species have created a global crisis for wild felids. Through an understanding of the history of cats in human culture and the impact human behavior has on wild felid populations, students will improve their science literacy and increase their confidence to make informed and responsible decisions regarding science policies.



Curriculum Guide Overview:

Major Educational Goals of the Curriculum Guide:

- To dispel misconceptions and to inform about the biology and behavior of felids.
- To bring attention to the highly endangered status of most species of wild felids.
- To instill the importance of species and wildlife conservation.
- To inspire a lifelong desire to protect species from endangerment and extinction.
- To introduce and encourage the study of science in young people.
- To introduce students to the history of felids in human cultures with activities extending in focus from ancient Egypt to present-day U.S. society.
- To encourage and illustrate the importance of responsible cat care with scientifically correct and relevant information.

The Cats! Wild to Mild Curriculum Guide is designed as an independent course of study for students in grades three through eight; educators may, however, alter activities to meet the academic needs of all grade levels. The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County recommends educators use this guide to frame a visit to the associated exhibition, Cats! Wild to Mild.

The Guide is broken down into the following units:

- Unit 1, What Is A Cat?, contains lessons focusing on general information regarding cats, felid biology, and *Felidae* species differentiation.
- The activities of Unit 2, Conservation and Endangerment, delve into issues of species conservation, species endangerment, and preventing species extinction.
- The activities of Unit 3, Cats and People, concentrate on the roles cats have played cross-culturally and through time, the symbolic imagery of felines in many cultures past and present, and the origins and affects of domestication on the house cat.
- Unit 4, Cat Care, contains activities emphasizing the importance of responsible cat care and the affects of neglect and irresponsible cat care.

Each of the guide's four units includes relevant background information for educators, and additional activities to supplement those outlined in each lesson. Moreover, many of the activities include separate instructions for younger (grades 3 to 6) students and older (grades 6 to 8) students. Educators will find a comprehensive annotated bibliography following the four units of study. The bibliography is organized by age level and media. Finally, the guide contains a resource list with organizations and institutions that offer additional information regarding cats, wildlife, and species protection and conservation.

