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# Keep Texas Wild

# THE WILD SIDE OF THE FAMILY

## Our dogs and cats have untamed cousins.

LEFT PHOTO © BOGAN COOPER/TPWD; RIGHT © SEAN FITZGERALD

## »WILD FAMILY

**MANY FAMILIES HAVE A DOG OR CAT — OR BOTH — AT HOME. Did you know that your pets have ancestors and relatives in the wild? Even though our cats and dogs are domesticated, they still have some wild left in them. Your dog still thinks like a wild dog, and you might see your cat act like a wild cat when it pounces on a toy mouse. All dogs and cats — wild and domestic — are part of the group of animals called carnivores, or meat eaters.**

# DOGS

**WOLVES** are the closest relatives to domestic dogs, but Texas no longer has any wolves in the wild. With wolves gone, foxes and coyotes expanded their territory. Here are the members of the dog family in Texas:

**COYOTES** are extremely clever animals with keen senses of sight smell and hearing. Coyotes are increasing in population because they're so adaptable. Coyotes will eat almost anything, including small mammals, fish, seeds and fruit. They like watermelon!

COYOTE

PHOTO © WYMAN MEINZER

**WOLVES** were reported to be in the state as late as the 1960s and early 1970s, but they don't exist in the wild in Texas any longer. Red wolves inhabited the eastern part of the state, and gray (timber) wolves lived in the western part of the state.

GRAY WOLF

PHOTO © TIM FITZHARRIS

PHOTO BY TPWD

**DOGS** started becoming domesticated more than 10,000 years ago when people may have begun using wolves as hunting partners. Dogs may have been the first tame animals.

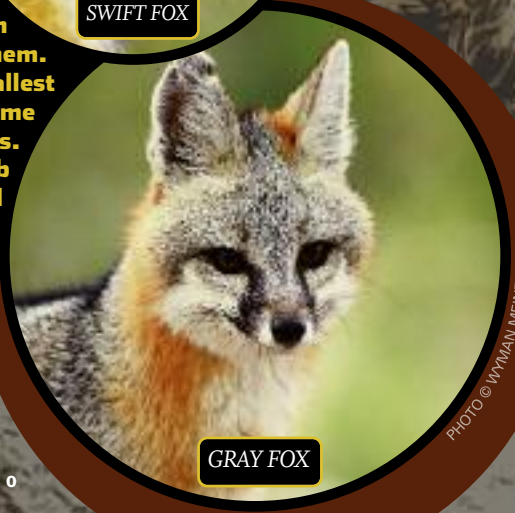
RED FOX

PHOTO © TIM FITZHARRIS

**TEXAS** has three types of foxes. Red foxes are in the dog family but in some ways are similar to cats in that they prey on mice and pounce on them. Swift foxes are the smallest American foxes and some of the fastest wild dogs. Gray foxes can climb trees, which is unusual for dog-like animals.

SWIFT FOX

PHOTO © LARRY DITTO



GRAY FOX

PHOTO © WYMAN MEINZER

**WILD** animals are animals that occasionally or never have contact with humans. If an animal can find food and reproduce on its own in the wild, it is probably wild.

**DOMESTICATED** animals are animals that were wild before being kept in captivity by humans. Humans have bred these animals for special purposes either as pets or livestock. Some domesticated animals are tame, such as pets, but many domesticated animals aren t tame.

**FERAL** animals are animals that became wild again after being domesticated by humans.

# CATS

**OUR wild cats in Texas are relatives of our cats at home. You might see neighborhood cats running across the street, but wild cats are much more elusive. Texas has more species of wild cat than any other state in the USA*! Here are the members of the cat family in Texas:**

**PEOPLE believe that the cats we have today started becoming domesticated when cats began living in or near human settlements at least 5,000 years ago. The humans realized how helpful cats were with things such as control ling rodents.**

PHOTO © STEVEN HOLT/BRENDA MOSELY

**MOUNTAIN lions (also called cougars, panthers or pumas) are secretive animals that eat large prey such as deer — and sometimes smaller prey. They have a special technique to kill and eat porcupines. To avoid the porcupine's quills, they slip one paw under the animal and then flip it over.**

MOUNTAIN LION

PHOTO © TIM FITZHARRIS

BOBCAT

PHOTO © TIM FITZHARRIS

**BOBCATS are medium-sized animals that feast on small mammals and birds. A bobcat's tail is short and stubby, which makes the bobcat different from other wild cats. Bobcats are found only in North America, and they are our most common wild cat.**

**THE jaguarundi is considered extremely rare in Texas. It lives in only the very southern part of Texas. It is a little bit bigger than a housecat and has two color phases – reddish and gray.**

JAGUARUNDI

PHOTO © THOMAS MARENT/ROLFNP.COM

*** SORRY! We didn't include margays or jaguars in this section. These wild cats used to roam our state, but the last sightings of these extraordinary animals were 100 years ago or more.**

OCELOT

PHOTO © ROLF NUSSBAUMER/ROLFNP.COM

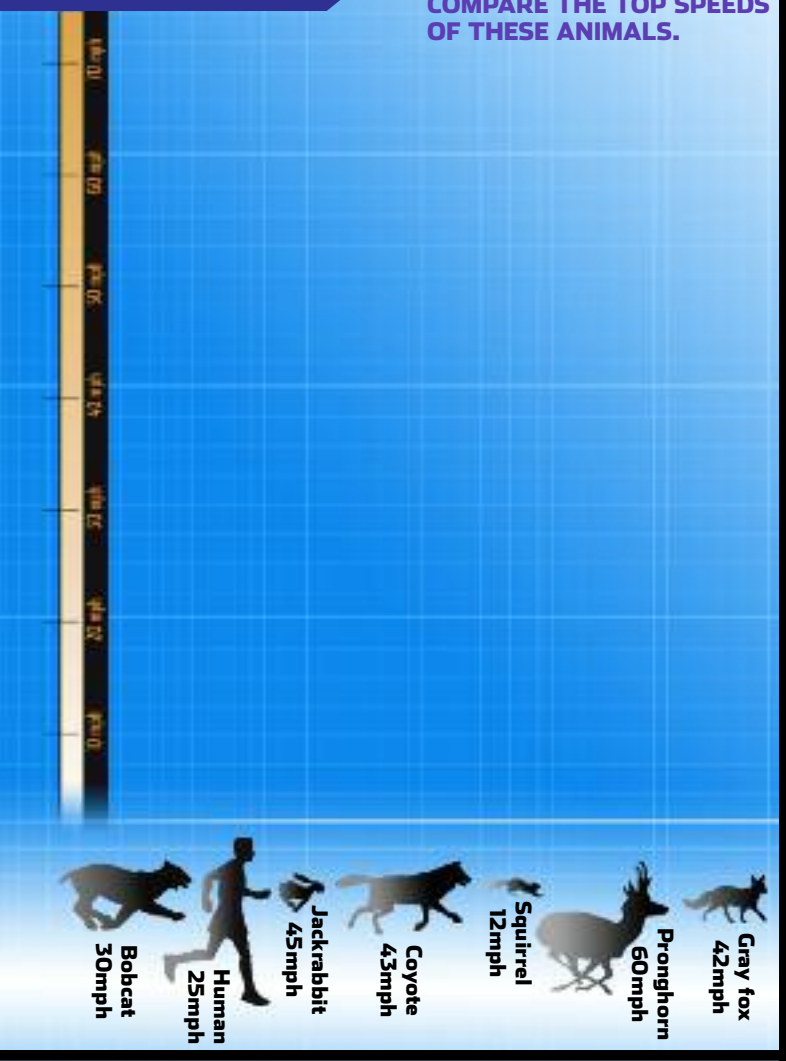
**THE only known U.S. population of ocelots is in Texas. These beautiful cats used to live in all of southern Texas and Louisiana, but because of habitat loss, they now live in a much smaller area. No two ocelots have the same markings.**

*Keep Texas Wild has a special guest author this month — fourth-grader Luke Roe of Austin. For more on Luke, see In the Field on Page 5.*

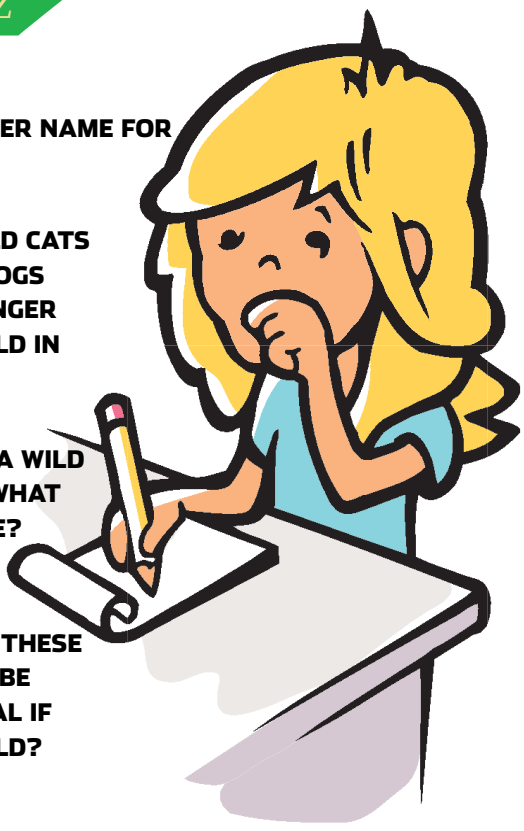
# Spike's Activity Page

## WILD *MATH*

**CREATE A GRAPH TO COMPARE THE TOP SPEEDS OF THESE ANIMALS.**




## WILD *QUIZ*



1. WHAT'S ANOTHER NAME FOR A PUMA?

2. NAME TWO WILD CATS AND TWO WILD DOGS THAT ARE NO LONGER FOUND IN THE WILD IN TEXAS.

3. HEY, THERE IS A WILD DOG IN A TREE! WHAT IS IT LIKELY TO BE?

4. WHICH ONE OF THESE ANIMALS WOULD BE CONSIDERED FERAL IF FOUND IN THE WILD?

   A. jaguarundi
   B. ocelot
   C. house cat

5. WHAT TWO TYPES OF WILD DOGS EXPANDED IN TEXAS WHEN THE WOLF NO LONGER LIVED HERE?

## KEEPING IT *WILD*

**LOOK AT YOUR DOG OR CAT (OR A FRIEND'S PET). See if you can identify the characteristics your pet shares with wild dogs or wild cats. Can you spot your pet's canine teeth, used for tearing meat? Have you felt your cat's rough tongue? The roughness helps cats scrape all the meat off a bone. Look at your dog's tail. Dogs — and coyotes and wolves — use their tails for balancing while running and for signaling to other animals (and to you!).**

## NEXT *MONTH:* Bloodsuckers

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