

# Florida's Cat: the panther

**WHO:** I am a large, long-tailed and furry wild cat known as Florida's state animal. I like to live in pinelands or swampy forests, where there's shade, water, and tons of space!

**WHY:** I am Florida's top predator, meaning that I am a necessary element to regulate South Florida's food chain. Without me, the Florida food chain becomes imbalanced.

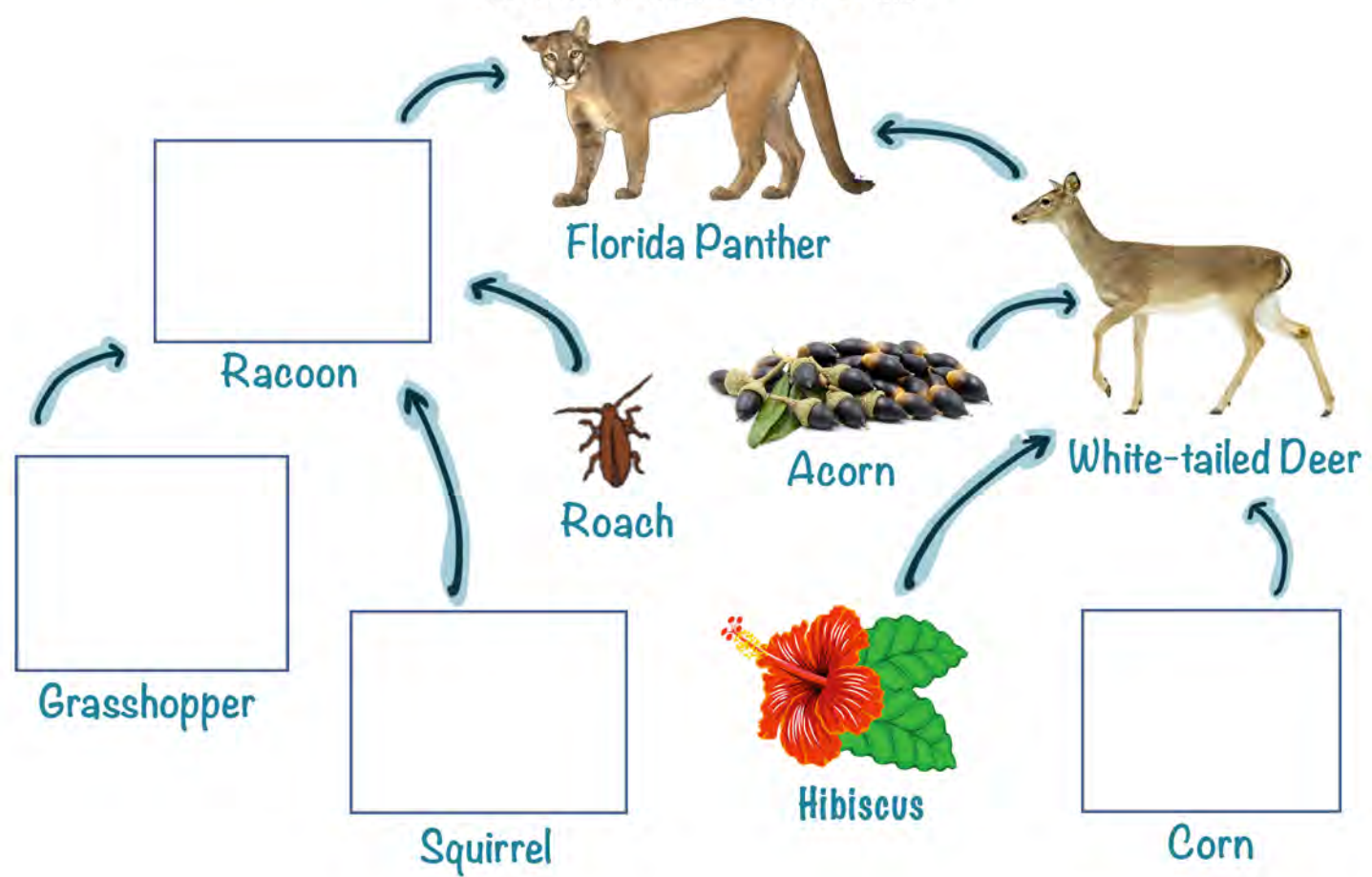
**FUN FACT**

I'm like a housecat, I can only purr, not roar.



1 Below is a chart of South Florida's food chain. It demonstrates what each animal eats. The arrows point at the animal that eats what it has around. For example, Florida panthers eat racoons and white-tailed deer. This graphic helps you understand why our state cat is important to keep the food chain balanced. Some animals and plants are missing from our chart. Could you draw them to complete our chart?

### South Florida's Food Chain





- 2 The Florida Panther is an endangered species. There are only 120 to 130 left due to construction and other human interferences. These mammals are essential to balancing other prey populations and maintaining their health.

Based on the chart of South Florida's food chain, what do you think would happen to the racoon and deer populations if the Florida Panther went extinct?

Write or draw your answer below

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- 3 Do you know what to do if you encounter a Florida Panther? Complete the paragraph below with the words in the box to find out

larger   escape   noise   instinct   prey   close   away

When you walk or hike in panther country, go in groups and make \_\_\_\_\_ to reduce the risk of surprising a panther. Keep children \_\_\_\_\_ to you and within sight. If you come upon a panther, what appears to be a panther kill, or see panther kittens, be alert and move \_\_\_\_\_ from the area. Most panthers will try to avoid a confrontation, give them a way to \_\_\_\_\_.

If a panther confronts you, do not run, it may trigger the animal's \_\_\_\_\_ to chase and attack. Instead, face the panther, stand upright and back away slowly. Raise or wave your arms slowly to appear \_\_\_\_\_ and speak firmly to the animal. Open your jacket if you are wearing one. If the panther behaves aggressively, throw objects at it. You want to convince the panther that you are not its \_\_\_\_\_ and that you are dangerous. Panthers are sometimes driven away by prey animals that fight back.