



Loli is a mature female leopard with two cubs. As the sun sets on the vast African plain and the sky comes alive with starlight, Loli slips out of the protective bushes where she has been resting with her cubs in the heat of the day. Like all cats—including domestic ones—Loli is a born stalker and will spend the night hunting for prey, the food she needs for herself and her cubs.



Photo: Learning Resources Pictures

Loli must pick her prey carefully to avoid getting injured. As the sole provider for her cubs, she must stay healthy and strong because her cubs will die without her. She is likely to avoid animals whose horns are too powerful and could inflict a fatal injury. Loli also must compete with many other predators who also hunt at night.

Because it was the rainy season in Samburu when AWF researchers first saw Loli, they knew her nightly hunts might bring her close to exhaustion. During every rainy season, when water is plentiful and Africa's dry landscapes turn green, many of the animals Loli likes to hunt don't need to depend on just a few watering holes. They can range across much greater distances. Loli will have to do the same to find them. She will have to travel farther

from where she has left her cubs to track down the impala, gazelle, and smaller antelopes she prefers to hunt. She will have to expend more energy in the chase. And even if her hunt is successful, she may end up having her food taken by other predators like lions and hyenas. If they challenge Loli, she will surrender her hard-won prey. An injury she might sustain fighting to keep her food could deprive her cubs of her care and attention.

But if Loli is quick enough and strong enough to chase down her prey and drag the carcass up a tree—an incredible feat of strength unmatched by any other big cat—then she and her cubs will have the meat they need to survive for one more day.

Did you know?

- Pound for pound, the leopard is the strongest climber of all the large cats, and is capable of killing prey larger than itself.
- Africa's leopards come in a variety of coat colors, from a tawny beige in dryer grassland areas to a darker shade in forested habitats.
- Lions and hyenas will challenge a leopard for the prey it has killed. To avoid these confrontations, a leopard uses its powerful limb and neck muscles to drag its prey high into the safety of a tree where it can eat in relative safety.
- It has been said that the leopard is such a cunning hunter, it brushes out its tracks with its unusually long tail as it walks along.

