

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “What’s the deadliest cat?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

Hey. It's Esther. And this is Olive, my pet cat. Olive is obsessed with watching birds. When she spots one, she makes a special sound. And other cats do it too. Listen. Weird, right? It's a squeaky, chattering noise. It might sound cute, but scientists think cats do this because they want to eat the birds. Someone named Wyatt has a question about cats. Let's give Wyatt a call now.

[Video Call]

- Hi, Esther.
- Hi, Wyatt.
- I have a question for you. What is the deadliest cat?
- That's a great question.

You probably know that there are all sorts of pet cats. There are also cats that live in the wild, like lions, tigers, cheetahs, snow leopards, bobcats, and more. Wild cats can be much bigger, but they have some surprising similarities with their household cousins. For instance, both Olive and a lion are naturally meat eaters. Olive's meat usually comes from a can. But in the wild, cats are predators. That means they get their meat by hunting and eating other animals. The animals they eat for food are called their prey. So when scientists talk about the deadliest cat, they mean deadly to its prey. The deadliest cat is the kind of cat that is the best at catching food. Think

about the different cats you know. There's so many amazing kinds. But which kind do you think is the best at catching food?

VIDEO 2

It's time to show you which wild cat is the best at catching its prey. Here it comes in three, two, one: this is the deadliest cat. Hey, you might be surprised. I know I was. The deadliest cat is just...so cute. It looks like a pet you can pick up and snuggle, But this is not a pet. This is a black-footed cat, a kind of cat that lives in the dry grasslands in Southern Africa. It's also one of the smallest kinds of cat in the world. An adult black-footed cat can be barely as long as a tiger's tail, or smaller! It's so small that most pet cats are bigger. But don't let its small size fool you. This cat is a deadly hunter. Even though bigger cats have powerful bodies and huge teeth, they don't always catch the prey they hunt. A lot of prey ends up escaping, and the cat stays hungry. Take lions. At best, for every 10 tries at hunting, lions catch their food about one, two, three times. The other seven—the prey gets away. And sometimes, lions are even less successful. But being a Bengal tiger might be harder. They only catch their food about one in 10 tries or less. A lot of their prey ends up getting away. In comparison, black-footed cats are crushing it as hunters. Out of 10 tries, they catch their food a whopping one, two, three, four, five, six times. Of course, a tiny black-footed cat isn't much of a threat to big animals like this wildebeest, but animals like short-tailed gerbils need to look out. On average, a black-footed cat can catch 10 to 14 small animals in one night. And in one year, it might catch 3,000 rodents. Like I said, deadly. So what is it that makes black-footed cats such good hunters? It's hard to pinpoint. In some ways, black-footed cats are a lot like their bigger cat cousins. They've got eyes that see well in the dark, ears that scan for every sound, and when it's time to pounce, they've got claws and long, sharp teeth. Plus, check out their fur. See how both cats have dark marks? Those patterns

help them blend in where they live. Like this: did you spot the tiger here? A black-footed cat's fur helps it hide among shadows when it hunts at night, and it hunts nearly all night every night. That's something that does make the black-footed cat different from bigger cats. Some big cats can go days between hunts. So maybe the black-footed cat's success comes down to practice. Maybe all that time spent hunting each night helps them perfect their skills. So, in summary, the deadliest wild cat is the black-footed cat of Southern Africa. Black-footed cats may be one of the smallest cats in the wild, but they're also the most successful when it comes to catching prey. That makes it the deadliest cat to the animals it eats. Hunting is an important part of how cats in the wild survive. Even pet cats that don't have to catch their food are still hunters at heart. Olive loves to hunt for this feathery toy. Maybe she's pretending it's a real bird. And watch this cat. Notice how it's moving? It's crouched down low, intensely focused on its toy, until...pounce! You might say this cat is playing, but those are the same moves cats in the wild use to hunt. So the next time you see a pet cat sneaking up on a toy, remember that it's practicing the hunting skills that help its wild cousins. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Wyatt, for asking it.