

How the Leopard Got His Spots

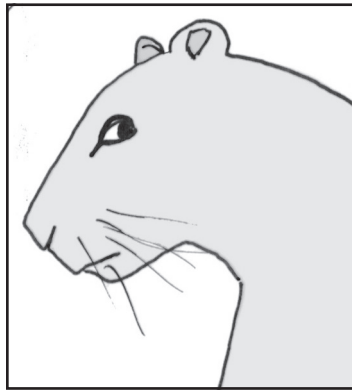
Based on Rudyard Kipling's Just So Stories



In the beginning of the world, things looked very different from how they appear today. In Africa, Leopard resided in a hot and sandy-colored habitat called the Highveld. In those days the hides of animals were different than how they appear today. Leopard was a sandy yellow color, Zebra was a light grey color, and Giraffe was a light yellow color. When Leopard lay on the ground, his sandy yellow hide perfectly camouflaged him, making it nearly impossible to spot him lying on the ground. He played a game where he would lie in wait for Zebra and Giraffe to happen by, then he would jump out and frighten them half to death. This jack-in-the-box game delighted Leopard, but Zebra and Giraffe were far less thrilled.

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Zebra and Giraffe relocated to the Bushveld to get away from Leopard. The Bushveld was covered in towering trees and the sunlight that penetrated the canopy of the forest cast blotchy-stripy shadows on the forest floor. Zebra and Giraffe stayed in the shadows for so long that the shadows changed the colors of their coats. Zebra often stood in the stripy shadows and eventually grew dark stripes all over his body. Giraffe stood frequently in the blotchy shadows and eventually grew large spots all over his body. Soon, they were as well camouflaged in the forest as Leopard was in the Highveld—you could stand right next to them and not even see them.



Leopard missed his friends Zebra and Giraffe, so he asked his friend the Ethiopian if he knew where they went. The Ethiopian, a human man, was a sandy yellow color in those days, too. The Ethiopian didn't know where Zebra and Giraffe were, but he decided to go along with Leopard in search of them.

One blistering sunny day, their search brought them to the Bushveld. Sandy-yellow Leopard and the Ethiopian stood out in the patchy light of the shadowy forest.

"I can smell Zebra, but I don't see him anywhere," said Leopard.

"I can smell Giraffe, but I don't see him anywhere either," said the Ethiopian.

"Let's try looking for them again at night and perhaps we'll have more luck," suggested Leopard.

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That night, they crept into the forest to look for their friends. Leopard smelled Zebra and he felt Zebra, but the stripy thing he caught didn't look anything like his friend Zebra. The Ethiopian had the same experience with Giraffe. Zebra and Giraffe explained how their spots and stripes hid them in the forest like Leopard's color hid him in the Highveld. Leopard and the Ethiopian realized that they would have to modify their hides like Zebra and Giraffe if they wanted to live in the Bushveld.

The Ethiopian found some black mud in the shadows. He covered himself in it and it transformed the color of his skin to a shadowy black, which hasn't changed since.

"Wow," said Leopard. "Can you camouflage me, too? I don't want to be black all over, I prefer some spots like Giraffe."

So the Ethiopian took the mud and painted spots on Leopard using the tips of his fingers. And since that day, Leopard has had splotchy spots all over his hide.

