BOBCATS
After reading “At Home with the Bobcats,” pages 6-11, give your children a chance to share stories about how you are like Momcat. Children may discuss the ways you protect them, feed them, teach them skills, and help them clean and groom themselves. Here are some questions to guide the discussion:

- What are some activities you enjoy/do not enjoy doing together?
- What is your favorite food/meal that is prepared for you?
- What is one skill I’ve taught you?

ANIMAL ATHLETES
Have your children read “Animal Athletes,” pages 14-19. Then ask:

- Which animal athletes show incredible endurance?
- Which animal champion can lift 100 times its own weight?

Ask your children to choose a sport not mentioned in the story and then together, research animals that might win that event on the basis of their characteristics and adaptations. Last, use a smart phone or tablet to shoot a video recap about the event, featuring the chosen animals. The video should include information about the sport, competition highlights, and a “snapshot” (photo or drawing) of the winning animal athlete. (If making a video is not possible, write the recap as a news script.)

HELLBENDERS
Nicknames, such as the ones found in this issue’s story about the large salamander known as a hellbender, can make us giggle. Each quirky name—lasagna lizard, snot otter—refers to one of the salamander’s physical characteristics.

After reading “Hellbenders,” pages 24-27, have your children research other animal nicknames, such as “monkey-bear” (koala) and “dumbledore” (bumble bee). Have each child select four animals with interesting nicknames and create a digital or hand-written mini-book. Each book should include the elements of a book (cover, title page, table of contents, and bibliography), images of the four animals, and their associated nicknames. On each page, include an explanation of how/why the animal was given its unique name.

FIRE BIRD
Not all forest fires are harmful. In fact, they play an important role in the overall health of a forest ecosystem and the wildlife that depends on it. After reading “Fire Bird” on pages 32-35, ask your children to recall why small, fast-burning fires are important to red-cockaded woodpeckers.

Provide each child with a piece of unlined paper. Instruct them to turn the paper so it lies horizontally (landscape), then fold the paper in half, creating left and right panels. Title the page “Red-Cockaded Woodpecker’s Forest Habitat.” Label the left panel “Before a Fire” and the right panel “After a Fire.” Children will draw and color “snapshots” of the habitat before and after a fire. On the back, have your children describe why natural fires or controlled burns are important to the birds’ survival.

“ANIMAL ATHLETES” ACTIVITY ANSWERS (PAGE 2): 1-B, 2-C, 3-A, 4-C, 5-B.
ANIMAL ATHLETES

Read “Animal Athletes” on pages 14–19. Answer the questions about animal champions below, then check your score. Will YOU earn a gold medal?

1. In the 100-yard dash, the cheetah wins the gold by zipping along at . . .
   a. 25 mph  
   b. 60 mph  
   c. 75 mph

2. The cougar would take home the gold for its high-jump skills. It can leap as high as . . .
   a. 8 feet  
   b. 12 feet  
   c. 18 feet

3. A sailfish can torpedo through the water at 68 miles per hour. How many seconds would it take the fish to complete the 400-meter freestyle?
   a. 13 seconds  
   b. 35 seconds  
   c. 60 seconds

4. In a gymnastics floor routine, you’re sure to see a lot of flips. How many times per second can Africa’s golden wheel spider cartwheel downhill?
   a. 10  
   b. 31  
   c. 44

5. In the weightlifting event, the super-strong rhinoceros beetle can lift how many times its own weight?
   a. 25 times  
   b. 100 times  
   c. 250 times

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In certain cold, clear rivers of the central and eastern United States (see map), fishes swim, turtles crawl, crayfish skitter, and snakes slither. But another, much rarer, kind of creature might live there, too.

Hiding under flat rocks during the day, an eastern hellbender (left) keeps a low profile. Even though hellbenders can grow to be as long as your arm, most people who live near them have never even seen one. But there's a lot to discover about this slimy salamander!

Hellbender? Snot otter? Lasagna lizard? This secretive salamander goes by lots of different names. But many people have never even heard of it.

The waters where hellbenders live are home to lots of other animals as well, including many species of fishes.

The hellbender is the biggest salamander in the United States. Like frogs and toads, salamanders are amphibians.

Hellbender populations are getting smaller. The story on pages 22-27 explores some of the reasons for the salamander’s decline. Use the concept map below to identify cause-and-effect relationships.
ANIMALS IN WATER

Summertime is a great time to stay cool in the water, isn’t it? Animals think so, too! On a visit to your favorite wet place in nature (a stream, a pond, a river, a lake, the seashore), see if you can find some animals in the water.

Helpful Things to Take Along

- Bucket
- Magnifying glass
- Small net

Keep a Record!

Date _____ Time _____
Location _____________ Weather _____________

What kind of wet place are you exploring? Describe what you see around you.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

In each box below, draw or describe one living thing you find in or near the water.