



## Sabertooth Fact Sheet

**Common Name:** Smilodon fatalis

**Scientific Name:** Deadly knife-tooth

**Wild Status:** Pleistocene Epoch, 2.5 MYA-10000 years ago

**Habitat:** North America

**Country:** Countries in North America

**Shelter:** Unknown

**Life Span:** Unknown

**Size:** 6 feet long, 3 feet tall at the shoulder, 600 pounds

### Details

There is no such thing as a “sabertoothed tiger”, the correct term is sabertooth cat and there have been many different varieties over time. *Smilodon* is just one genus. The name sabertooth comes from the elongated, flattened [canines](#) that in some species could grow up to a foot long and were used as specialized killing tools. The condition of having saberteeth is known as [machairodont](#) and has evolved independently in a half-dozen different groups of animals. Although best known in cats, sabertooths also appeared in two closely related groups, the nirmavids and the barboufelids.

*Thylacomsilus* was a machairodont [marsupial](#) from South America even better adapted for this lifestyle than the cats, and Machaeroides was a member of a family of carnivores that existed prior to the evolution of the Carnivora. There was even a group of sabertooths from before the [dinosaurs](#), fearsome animals called gorgonopsids that were closer to [mammals](#) than [reptiles](#).

### Cool Facts

- Due to its long, thin teeth, *Smilodon* was unable to employ the throttling bite that

extant [big cats](#) use to kill their prey. Instead, it would have had to rely on its immense upper body strength to pull animals down and hold them in place.

- The jaws could be opened over 90 degrees but could only close them with about a third the power of a similarly-sized lion. Rather than using jaw muscles, *Smilodon* used its powerful neck to drive the top of the skull downwards in what is known as a [canine-shear bite](#). This precision bite allowed the cat to attack the the windpipe and major blood vessels of the throat all at once. Even large prey such as ground sloths and juvenile [mammoths](#) would have bled out very quickly.
- *Smilodon* is one of the best known prehistoric animals due to the high concentration of [fossils](#) that have been uncovered at the [La Brea Tar Pits](#) in Los Angeles. The remains of more than 2,000 individual cats have been pulled from the tar. Many of the bones bear signs of injury, including some that would have prevented the animals from hunting properly. However, these injuries all show healing and the individuals died as a result of being trapped in the tar rather than starvation or predation. All of this evidence taken together suggests sabertooths may have been social animals, although if true it is likely their social structure would have been more analogous to a wolf [pack](#) than a lion pride.

### **Taxonomic Breakdown**

**Kingdom:** Animalia

**Phylum:** Chordata

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Carnivora

**Family:** Felidae

**Genus:** *Smilodon*

**Species:** *S. fatalis*

### **Conservation & Helping**

Sabertooth cats are currently extinct, and were believed to exist 2.5 Million - 10,000 Years Ago

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