Outdoors in California

If you spend any time hiking, camping and mountain biking you have probably been seen by mountain lions. Mountain lion attacks on humans are on the rise in the U.S. and Canada, resulting in both serious injury and deaths. Still the chances of being attacked are extremely remote.

Those familiar with mountain lions recommend the following:

- Never hike alone or off trails.
- Keep children with you at all times, and do not let them wander ahead or lag behind.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Look ahead and behind frequently.
- Do not let pets run free, keep them on a leash.
- Respect park rules and warnings of the area's wildlife.
- Carry a walking stick, air horn, whistle, rocks to throw or similar protection while hiking.

If you encounter a mountain lion, you should:

- Stand your ground facing the animal. DO NOT turn and run.
- Make yourself as large and imposing as possible. Raise your arms (open your jacket), stand tall and speak in a low, loud aggressive tone.
- If you have small children with you, pick them up. First bring the child close to you, maintain eye contact with the animal, pull the child up without bending over. Groups of children or adults should band together.
- Never turn your back, bend or crouch down. It gives the appearance that you are a four legged prey animal.
- If attacked, *FIGHT BACK. DO NOT PLAY DEAD*. People who have survived attacks have fought back aggressively, using anything at their disposal to fend the animal off.

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14409 Vanowen Street
Los Angeles, CA 91405

West Valley Shelter
20655 Plummer Street
Chatsworth, CA 91311

South LA Shelter
1850 W 60th Street
Los Angeles. CA 90047

West LA Shelter
11361 W Pico Boulevard
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ENCOUNTERS WITH...

MOUNTAIN LIONS

Photo courtesy US Fish Wildlife

City of Los Angeles Department of Animal Services Wildlife Division

LA ANIMAL SERVICES

The Mountain Lion

Their Latin name is Felis concolor (cat all of one color), but they could also be known as cat of many names, such as puma, catamount, panther or cougar.

Photo courtesy US Fish & Wildlife

Mountain lions can be found in most states across the nation, and are doing well in California. Population estimates in California are from many hundreds to as much as 10,000 animals. It is remarkable that so many mountain lions can live in or near human populations usually with little or no consequence, but occasionally there are problems. Regardless, anyone who catches a glimpse of one will likely never forget it.

Mountain lions are generally a solid tawny or varying shades of a tan color. The ends of their ears and tail are black tipped. They can be very large in size with some males reaching 8 feet long and up to 180 lbs. Their tail is long in relation to its body, and is used use for balance and control while chasing prey. Mountain lions eat a variety of prey, among them rabbits, squirrels, coyotes and raccoons, but the mainstay of their diet is larger prey such as deer. If you live in an area with a large population of deer chances are you live in mountain lion territory.

Mountain lions will attack livestock (cows, sheep, goats etc.) if the opportunity is present. Occasionally they will kill and eat domestic pets. Most dogs are no match for a hungry lion. In extremely rare instances people have fallen victim to mountain lion attacks.

Range of Calif. Mt. Lions

Their habitat is shrinking, so encounters increase. Along with continued urban development more people have taken to our mountains and wild land environments for recreation, places mountain lions reside. Mountain biking, camping, hiking, rock climbing and off road-riding have all grown in popularity, and mountain lion encounters have inevitably risen.

Another possible reason for the rise of lion encounters was the passing of California Proposition 117 (1990) which banned the legal taking of any mountain lion for sport. Since then more lions have been taken via special permits from the state (depredation permits), for lions causing damage or threatening humans, than were taken when legally hunted.

MOUNTAIN LIONS IN TROUBLE

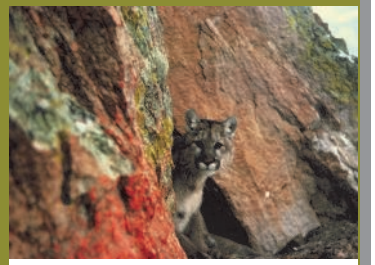

Photo courtesy US Fish & Wildlife

There may be several reasons a mountain lion behaves in a manner that conflicts with human lifestyles. Lions that are sick, injured, immature or old may be forced to prey on easiest targets, such as pets and livestock, out of desperation. Often juvenile cats are forced to take territory that is marginal at best, and may have a limited prey base. If large animals such as deer are hard to find they will often prey on whatever food source is available.

The predatory instincts of the mountain lion are very strong so the unwary movements of humans and pets are often the trigger causing predatory instinct to take over.

Mountain lion signs

You should notify your local Animal Control, State Fish & Game, US Fish & Wildlife or law enforcement if you notice any of the following:

Tracks

- Mountain lion paw prints are generally large, 3-4 inches wide, 3 inches long and claw marks are absent. The pads have a flattened, distinctive 'M' shape.

Partially buried animal carcass

- Mountain lions often tend to bury their prey under loose leaves, brush and twigs; they will feed off of the carcass for several days. Should you come across such a find, a lion is likely close by. Slowly back away and make your presence known so as not to surprise the lion. They ambush from behind so be aware of your entire surroundings, and leave the scene very cautiously.