



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

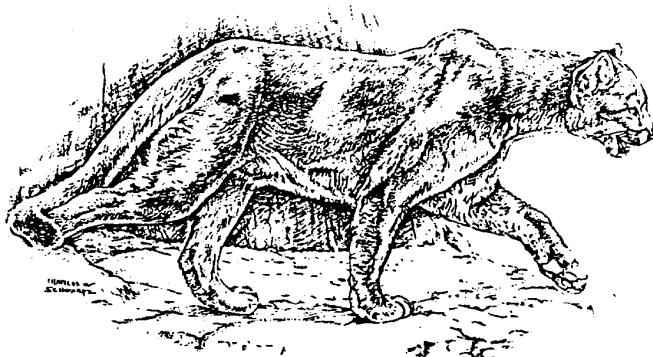
Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

Wildlife  
Services

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## MANAGING MOUNTAIN LION PROBLEMS

Mountain lions (*Felis concolor*) are the largest native North American cat except for the slightly larger jaguar. Mountain lions are known by a number of different names - cougar, panther, painter, catamount, and puma. They are primarily nocturnal, shy, elusive, and solitary (except during the breeding season and when young are traveling with the female). They are very fast animals over a short distance, but because of relatively small lung capacity, cannot run great distances. They are agile tree climbers. Males are generally larger than females averaging 130 to 150 pounds in weight and ranging in length from 72 to 90 inches. Females average 65 to 90 pounds. Pads on the forefeet are larger than those on the hindfeet. Heelpads on both the fore- and hindfeet have a distinctive three-lobe appearance. Claw-marks seldom show in the tracks of this species.



### BIOLOGY

Mountain lions are mainly nocturnal, preferring to hunt at night. Deer are their favorite prey. They have also been known to prey on beaver, porcupines, rabbits, skunks, domestic livestock, pets, and other small mammals, birds, and even fish. Larger animals are usually killed by a bite to the back of the neck. Lions usually remove the viscera and eat the heart, liver, and lungs first. Uneaten portions of prey items are often cached (covered with vegetation, dirt, snow, or other debris). These food sources are generally fed upon until consumed or they spoil. Lions generally move the carcass and re-cover it after each feeding. Dens can be found in any concealed, sheltered spot. Male lions roam widely, females less widely, especially when the cubs are small. Adult male home ranges often encompass more than 100 square miles. Adult males use their hind feet to scrape duff into a small pile to declare their territory. These "scrapes" or "scratches" are often 6 to 18 inches long and 6 to 12 inches wide. Females generally occupy ranges from 20 to 60 square miles. Females breed first at two or

three years of age, then every 18 to 20 months thereafter. Young may be born at any time of the year. Gestation period is 88 to 97 days. Litters range from one to six, generally two or three. Juvenile markings (spots) generally disappear by fifteen months.

### DAMAGE

Mountain lions are significant predators of sheep, goats, cattle, horses, house cats, dogs, and poultry in some areas of California. Damage is often random and unpredictable, but when it occurs, large numbers of livestock can be killed in short periods of time, a behavior known as surplus killing. The number of depredation permits issued by the Department of Fish and Game has increased substantially in recent years.

Several attacks on humans have been documented in California, with two recent (1994) fatal attacks.

### DISEASE

Generally speaking the mountain lion seems to be relatively free from ecto-parasites. Rabies, feline leukemia and Lymes disease have been documented in California mountain lions.

### PROBLEM PREVENTION

Mountain lions are often attracted to urban/suburban situations by easy prey items such as domestic pets/animals and deer that live in these areas. Younger lions, dispersing from fully occupied mountain lion habitat, may also end up in these areas, trying to establish their own territories. In the rural areas of California, mountain lion range commonly overlaps livestock grazing land.

To prevent predation of domestic livestock or pets by mountain lions, exclusion, using heavy woven wire fencing at least 10 feet high is required. Overhead fencing is necessary for complete and permanent protection. This is very expensive and practical only for extremely valuable livestock, poultry, or pets. Removal of brush and trees within 1/4 mile of buildings or livestock/pet enclosures may help reduce depredations because lions prefer to hunt and stay where escape cover is readily available. Bright lights, strobe lights, loud music or other recordings, barking dogs, and moveable scare crows in depredation areas may help repel mountain lions. To decrease the attractiveness of your property to mountain lions, everything should be done to discourage potential



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prey animals, particularly deer, from living on your property or nearby. This includes landscaping with plants not attractive to deer, removing dense or low-lying vegetation that could hide a mountain lion, or provide habitat for other potential prey species and, not feeding wildlife to attract them.

#### HUMAN SAFETY

The California Department of Fish and Game provides a brochure titled "Living with California Mountain Lions" which suggests the following things to do if you encounter a mountain lion:

- 1) **Don't hike alone:** Go in groups, with adults supervising children.
- 2) **Keep the children close to you:** Observations of captured wild mountain lions reveal that the animals seem especially drawn to children. Keep children within your sight at all times.
- 3) **Do not approach a lion:** Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.
- 4) **Do not run from a lion:** Running may stimulate a mountain lion's instinct to chase. Instead, stand and face the animal. Make eye contact. If you have small children with you, pick them up if possible so they don't panic and run. Although it may be awkward, pick them up without bending over or turning away from the mountain lion.
- 5) **Do not crouch down or bend over:** In Nepal, a researcher studying tigers and leopards watched the big cats kill cattle and domestic water buffalo while ignoring humans standing nearby. He surmised that a human standing up is just not the right shape for a cat's prey. On the other hand, a person squatting or bending over looks a lot like a four-legged prey animal. If you are in mountain lion country, avoid squatting, crouching, or bending over, even when picking up children.
- 6) **Do all you can to appear larger:** Raise your arms. Open your jacket if you are wearing one. Again, pick up small children. Throw stones, branches, or whatever you can reach without crouching or turning your back. Wave your arm slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice. The idea is to convince the mountain lion that you are not prey and that you may be a danger to it.
- 7) **Fight back if attacked:** A hiker in Southern California used a rock to fend off a mountain lion that was attacking his son. Others have fought back successfully with sticks, caps, jackets, garden tools, and their bare hands. Since a mountain lion usually

tries to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the attacking animal.

#### DIRECT CONTROL

Shooting or capture with trailing dogs or live traps are effective, and the only legal ways, to take depredating mountain lions under a permit issued by the Department of Fish and Game. There are no federally listed chemical repellents or toxicants registered for mountain lion control.

#### LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The mountain lion is classified as a specially protected mammal in California. Only individual animals causing damage to property, livestock or human health and safety can be taken. Any mountain lion that is encountered in the act of inflicting injury to, molesting or killing livestock or domestic animals can be taken immediately providing the taking is reported to the California Department of Fish and Game within 72 hours. The Department of Fish and Game may remove or take any mountain lion or authorize an appropriate local agency with public safety responsibility to remove or take any mountain lion that is perceived to be an imminent threat to public health or safety.

An individual is not guilty of a violation if it is demonstrated that, in taking or injuring a mountain lion, the individual was acting in self-defence or in defence of others.

Any owner or tenant or agent suffering from damage/destruction to property by mountain lions can apply to the California Department of Fish and Game for a revocable permit to take the offending mountain lion/lions.

For further information on the legal status of mountain lions or assistance with a mountain lion depredation problem, contact your local California Department of Fish and Game office.

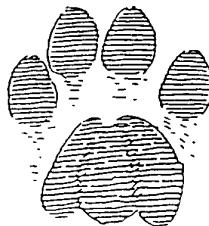
For additional information or assistance with the capture of a depredating mountain lion, contact the USDA-APHIS-WS State Office (916-979-2675) or the USDA-APHIS-WS District Office for your area.

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HIND

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