

Mountain Lion

AKA: Cougar, Puma, Panther, Catmount

Class: Mammal (Keystone Species)

Order: Carnivore

Family: Felidae

Length: Head and body, 3.25 to 5.25 feet

Tail, 23.5 to 33.5 inches

Height: Males reach 21 - 27 inches at the shoulder

Weight: 75 - 150 lbs.

Range: U.S., Canada, South America

Protection Status: Endangered

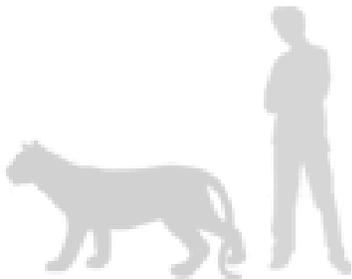


Photo, Courtesy of the National Geographic Society

Mountain Lions are solitary and shy animals, seldom seen by humans.

Physical Description

Mountain Lions are the second largest cat in the Americas, second only to the jaguar that ranges throughout South America. The mountain lion is large, slender, powerful and graceful. Its fur is short and coarse, much like a short-haired house cat. Its color can range from a yellowish brown to grayish brown on the upper parts of its body to a paler, almost buffy, color on the belly. The throat and chest are whitish. The mountain lion has a pinkish nose and black foot pads.



Courtesy of the National Geographic Society

The muzzle stripes, the area behind the ears, and the tip of the tail are also black. The eyes of mature animals are grayish brown to golden. The tail is long, cylindrical, and about one-third of the animal's total length.

The limbs are short and muscular. The feet are broad, with four digits on each foot, but five long curved claws to grasp prey or rip an enemy. When not in use, the mountain lion retracts its claws to protect the sharp points.

Diet

California's mountain lions eat mostly deer, but will also hunt voles, squirrels, mice, muskrats, porcupines, beavers, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, birds, and even snails and fish. Mountain lions prefer deer, but will prey on livestock and pets.

In extremely rare cases, even people have fallen prey to mountain lions. However, the public safety threat posed by mountain lions is very low. According to wildlife agency reports, mountain lions have only attacked 185 people in the U.S. and Canada between 1890 to 2000.



Habitat

Mountain lions roam throughout mountain coniferous forests, like our own Mount San Jacinto, lowland tropical forests, grassland, dry brush country, swamps, and any areas with adequate cover and prey. Dense vegetation, caves, and rocky crevices serve as temporary shelter places.



Courtesy, California Dept. of Fish & Game

Mountain lions once roamed across the entire U.S., up into the Canadian Yukon and into South America. Today, cougar populations are recognized by state game and fish departments in 15 states: Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Texas, Florida, North Dakota and South Dakota. More than half of California is mountain lion habitat.

According to cougarfund.org, cougars are listed as endangered in Florida and protected from sport hunting by law in California. Today, mountain lions are being displaced as man moves further into the mountain lions' habitat.

REFERENCES

www.dfg.ca.gov/keepmewild/lion.html

www.animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/mountain-lion/

www.cougarfund.org

www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/whc/programs/mountain_lions/index.cfm

Cougar Cubs

Female mountain lions are dedicated mothers, and are either pregnant or raising dependent cubs for the majority (76%) of their lives. Mothers spend around 18-24 months raising cubs. Litter size is usually 2-3 cubs. Research indicates that cub survival rate is 60-66% in areas where the big cats are not susceptible to hunting pressure by humans. As cubs grow, the survival rate of females increases, while that of the males decreases, likely due to greater competition and less tolerance toward supporting an overlap in home range by a newcomer male.

The greatest cause of mortality in many cougar populations is human-related, primarily through sport hunting, illegal poaching, lethal removal of cougars that prey on livestock or pets, autos, and the orphaning, and often subsequent death by starvation or predation of cubs when their mothers are killed for any of the above reasons.