

What We Know About Mountain Lions

The mountain lion, commonly known as cougar, panther or puma, exists only in the Western Hemisphere and is one of North America's biggest cats. Based on intensive scientific studies, it is extrapolated that there may be 4,500 to 5,500 mountain lions living in Colorado — although population estimates cannot be determined with a high level of confidence. A lion's natural life span is probably about 12 years in the wild and up to 25 years in captivity. Lions are very powerful and usually kill large animals, such as deer and elk. Natural enemies include other large predators such as bears, wolves and other mountain lions. They also fall victim to accidents, disease, road hazards and people.

The status of the mountain lion in Colorado evolved from that of a varmint, on which a \$50 bounty was offered from 1929, to designation as a big game species in 1965. The change in legal status reflected growing public appreciation and concern for sound lion management.

Physical Appearance

The lion's scientific name, *Puma concolor*, means "cat of one color." Mountain lions in Colorado are usually tawny to light cinnamon in color with black-tipped ears and tail. They vary in size and weight, with males being larger than females. Adult males may be more than 8 feet in length and weigh an average of 150 pounds. Adult females may be up to 7 feet long and weigh an average of 90 pounds.

Mountain lions are easily distinguished from other wild cat species in Colorado. Lions are much larger than lynx or bobcats and have a long tail, which may measure one-third of their total length.

Tracks

In an unhurried walk, lions usually place the hind paw in the imprint made by the front paw. They have four toes with three distinct lobes present at the base of the pad. Generally, claw marks are not visible since their claws are retractable.

Mountain lions are solitary animals. Adult males almost always travel alone. If tracks indicate two or more lions traveling together, it's probably a female with young.

Habitat

In Colorado, lions are found in areas of pinyon pine, juniper, mountain mahogany, ponderosa pine and oak

brush. Lions generally will be most abundant in areas with plentiful deer populations.

Individual lions range in areas varying in size from 10 to 370 square miles. Females with young kittens use the smallest area; adult males occupy the largest areas. Size of the home range depends on the terrain and how much food is available. Boundaries of a male's home range are marked with piles of dirt and twigs, called scrapes, which signal to other lions that this area is occupied.

Hunting And Feeding

Lions are most active from dusk to dawn, although they do travel and hunt in daylight. Lions prefer to eat deer; however they also kill elk, porcupines and other small mammals, livestock and a variety of domestic animals such as pets.

Like most cats, they take their prey by ambush rather than by a long pursuit. After spotting prey, lions stalk using available cover, then attack with a rush, often from behind. Lions usually kill with a powerful bite below the base of the skull, breaking the neck. They then drag the carcass to a sheltered spot to feed on it. They cover the carcass with dirt, leaves or snow and may return to feed on it over the course of a few days. Generally, they move the carcass and re-cover it after each feeding.

Lions feeding on a kill can be dangerous to people. Lions that have been fed by people or seem "tame" may become aggressive unexpectedly.

Mating And Breeding

Female lions generally reproduce when they are about 2½ years old. Courtship begins

when a roaming female in heat makes frequent calls and leaves a scent that attracts males. After locating the female, the male accompanies her for just a few days when mating occurs.

Breeding can take place throughout the year, but most females give birth between April and July, following a three-month gestation period.

Birth To Maturity

The female finds a secluded spot where she gives birth to an average of two to three young, called kittens. Care of the kittens rests solely with the female. She defends them vigorously, even against male lions which may kill them. Newborn kittens are about 1 foot long and weigh about 1 pound. They are covered with blackish-brown spots and have dark rings around their short tails. The young stir only to nurse until they are about two weeks old, when their eyes open and they become alert and playful. Weaning occurs at about two months.

Kittens learn hunting skills through play and exploration, and by watching their mother. When the young are about six weeks old, she begins taking them to her kills to feed.

As the kittens mature, their spots fade. At six months, they weigh over thirty pounds and are becoming capable hunters. Kittens remain with their mother for another year, improving their hunting skills.

What To Do If You Live In Lion Country

Generally, lions are calm, quiet and elusive. Lions are most commonly found in areas with plentiful deer populations and adequate cover.

Such conditions may exist in mountain subdivisions, urban fringes and open spaces. The number of mountain lion/human interactions has increased

due to a variety of reasons: more people moving into lion habitat, increase in deer populations and density, presumed increase in lion numbers and expanded range, more people using hiking and running trails in lion habitat and a greater awareness of the presence of lions.

We can live with these incredibly efficient predators if we respect mountain lions and their habitat. To reduce the risk of problems with mountain lions on or near your property, we urge you to follow these simple precautions.

■ When your children are playing outside, make sure there is at least one adult outside with them. Watching from inside the house is not good enough. Make sure children are inside before dusk and not outside before dawn.

■ Teach your children that if they are outside alone and they see a lion, that they need to stand up and keep facing the lion. They need to yell as loudly as they can to their parents or other adults that they can see a lion. They must back up slowly until they reach the house or nearest shelter. Tell them to never turn away from the lion and never run.

■ Make lots of noise if you come and go during the times when mountain lions are most active — dusk to dawn.

■ Install outside lighting. Light areas where you walk, so you could see a lion if one were present.

■ Landscape or remove vegetation to eliminate hiding places for lions especially around children's play areas. Make it difficult for lions to approach unseen.

■ Planting non-native shrubs and plants that deer often prefer to eat encourages wildlife to come onto your property. Predators follow prey.

■ DON'T FEED ANY WILDLIFE!

■ Keep pets under control. Roaming pets are easy prey and can attract lions. Bring pets in at night. If you leave your pet outside, keep it in a kennel with a secure top. Don't feed pets outside; this can attract raccoons and other animals that are eaten by lions. Store all garbage securely.

■ Place livestock in enclosed sheds or barns at night. Close doors to all outbuildings since inquisitive lions may go inside for a look.

■ Encourage your neighbors to follow these simple precautions. Prevention is far better than a possible lion confrontation.



Recreating in Lion Country

To reduce the likelihood of an encounter, or of an encounter turning into an attack, general alertness of surroundings is highly recommended. Look around — scan the sides of hills, behind rock outcroppings, under bushes and vegetation.

- **Make noise so you don't surprise a lion.**
- **Bike, hike and ski in groups.** Plan your trip so that you get back before dusk.
- **Run with a buddy.** Do not run alone in lion habitat. Do not run at dawn or dusk.
- **Before you set out, remind children how they should behave in lion country.**
- **Always keep children within arm's reach, preferably holding their hand.** If there are two adults, make a "kid sandwich," an adult in front of and in back of the child or children in the middle.

What To Do If You Meet A Mountain Lion

People rarely get more than a brief glimpse of a mountain lion in the wild. Lion attacks on people are rare, with fewer than a dozen fatalities in North America in more than 100 years. Based on the observations by people who have come upon lions, some patterns of behavior and response are beginning to emerge. Encounters with a lion are an interaction — you need to follow these guidelines and assess how the lion responds to your action so you can choose what to do next. Each situation is unique.

- **When you walk or hike in mountain lion country, go in groups and make plenty of noise to reduce your chances of surprising a lion.** A sturdy walking stick is a good idea; it can be used to ward off a lion.
- **Do not approach a lion, especially one that is feeding or with kittens.** Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.
- **Maintain visual contact with the lion so you can always see what it is doing — keep your eye on it!** If you look away, the lion could move and then you will not know where it is or what it's doing.

■ **STAY CALM** when you come upon a lion. Talk calmly yet firmly to it and make enough eye contact so that it knows you have seen it. Slowly back away. Most lions will run away, but sometimes they stay and you need to completely leave the area.

■ **STOP OR BACK AWAY SLOWLY**, if you can do it safely. Running may stimulate a lion's instinct to chase and attack. Face the lion and stand upright.

■ **DO ALL YOU CAN TO APPEAR LARGER.** Raise your arms. Position yourself to appear bigger by getting up on a stump or a rock. Open your jacket if you're wearing one. Stay upright and facing the lion.

■ **If you see a lion and you are with a small child, pick up the child immediately so they won't panic and run.** Tell the child not to speak — the high voice may sound like prey to a lion. This also helps you look bigger, and if the lion attacks, you can fold your body over the child to protect them. With a larger child, still keep them within arm's reach or in the middle. Have the child stand directly behind you and hold onto your belt or pants pocket.

■ **If the lion behaves aggressively, throw stones, branches or whatever you can get your hands on without crouching down or turning your back.** Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly. Convince the lion you are not prey and that you may in fact be a danger to the lion.

■ **If the lion behaves more aggressively (eyes locked on you, ears forward, feet underneath them), YELL LOUDLY** and wave your walking stick in front of you. Keep yelling in an aggressive manner. Loud, sustained noise is most effective at deterring a lion. An air horn may also be effective.

■ **If the lion gets even more aggressive (crouched, tail twitching, hind feet pumping in preparation to jump), be ready to fight back.**

■ **FIGHT BACK** if a lion attacks you. Lions have been driven away by prey that fights back. People have successfully fought back with rocks, sticks, caps or jackets, garden tools and their bare hands. Remain standing or if you are knocked down try to get back up!



DOV PHOTO

WHO DO YOU CALL?

The Colorado Division of Wildlife is responsible for managing, conserving, and protecting wildlife. Your concerns are our concerns about wildlife as well.

If you have an encounter with a lion or an attack occurs, please immediately contact the Division of Wildlife, Monday through Friday, 8AM - 5PM, as listed below. After hours, contact the Colorado State Patrol or your local Sheriff's Department. To report a sighting, please contact the Division during normal business hours. Your information is very valuable to us.

Division Headquarters - Administrative Offices

6060 Broadway, Denver, CO 80216 (303) 297-1192

Brush	(970) 842-6300
Colorado Springs	(719) 227-5200
Denver	(303) 291-7227
Durango	(970) 247-0855
Ft. Collins	(970) 472-4300
Glenwood Springs	(970) 947-2920
Grand Junction	(970) 255-6100
Gunnison	(970) 641-7060
Hot Sulphur Springs	(970) 725-6200
Lamar	(719) 336-6600
Meeker	(970) 878-6090
Monte Vista	(719) 587-6900
Montrose	(970) 252-6000
Pueblo	(719) 561-5300
Salida	(719) 530-5520
Steamboat Springs	(970) 870-2197

The Colorado Division of Wildlife is the state agency responsible for managing wildlife and its habitat, as well as providing wildlife-related recreation. The Division is funded through hunting and fishing license fees, federal grants and Colorado Lottery proceeds through Great Outdoors Colorado.

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COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

Living With Lions



Much of Colorado, including the Front Range, is prime lion country. This simple fact is a surprise to many residents and visitors. These large, powerful predators have always lived here, preying on plentiful deer and playing an important role in the ecosystem.

You may live in or recreate in lion country. Like any wildlife, mountain lions can be dangerous. With a better understanding of mountain lions and their habitat, we can coexist with these magnificent animals.

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