Life of the Mountain Lion

Appearance
Mountain lions are graceful and majestic animals known for their strength and agility. The image on the right shows the color and physical attributes of adults and kittens, and the chart below compares the size differences between adult males and females.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Adult Males</th>
<th>Adult Females</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shoulder Height</td>
<td>30 in. (76 cm)</td>
<td>24 in. (61 cm)</td>
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<td>Weight</td>
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<td>85–115 lbs. (38–52 kg)</td>
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Adult Males
- Shoulder height: 30 in. (76 cm)
- Weight: 120–180 lbs. (54–72 kg)
- Tail: Thick, long, black-tipped tail measures about one-third of the lion's body length and acts as a counterbalance for the lion's movements and as an instrument to assert dominance.
- Markings: Furry, spotted, and weighing around 92 lbs. (42 kg).
- Color: Tawny, grey-brown, or red-brown.
- Characteristic "mountain" and long whiskers.

Adult Females
- Shoulder height: 24 in. (61 cm)
- Weight: 5.5–6 ft. (1.6–1.8 m)
- Tail: Tail is approximately 18 in. (46 cm) long, is thick, black-tipped, and bushy.
- Markings: Black-tipped tail is bushy and bushy.
- Color: Grey-brown, with spots.

Reproduction
Mountain lions will mate with many other lions during a breeding season. Mating pairs can spend an average of 2 to 3 days together. Mountain lions are unusual among carnivores because they give birth at any time of year. While adult males play no role in the rearing of kittens, they may feed on a carcass with the female and her offspring.

Females can have their first litter at 2 1/2 to 3 years of age, and breed every 2 years thereafter. The gestation period is 3 months. Females move their nursing kittens frequently to new den sites for protection and to improve access to prey. The social bond is critical to the kittens' well-being. If the mother dies before the kittens reach 6 months of age, they have little to no chance of surviving.

The First Year
- 92-day Gestation to Birth: 3 to 4 kittens are born, fully furred, spotted, and weighing just over a pound at birth.
- 2 weeks old: Eyes and ears open. Mother leaves for short periods of time to hunt.
- 6 to 8 weeks old: As kittens grow, they accompany their mother on hunts.
- 6 to 12 months: Juvenile becomes more independent. Spars continue to fade. They disperse at about 18 months to establish their own territories.

Coats of kittens have blackish-brown spots which gradually fade to tawny. They disappear completely in about 18 months.

Mountain Lion Safety Tips

Home Safety
- Don't feed deer, other wildlife, or feral cats which can attract mountain lions.
- Landscape: Use trees as a barrier to keep mountain lions from using them as hiding spots.
- Use lighting to illuminate walkways at night. Lighting will not deter a lion, but it will allow you to see your surroundings.
- Install double-deck fencing to prevent deer from entering your property.
- Seat off open spaces around your home and enclosures.
- Do not make food, water, or shelter available near your home.
- Mountain lions use vegetation areas to move through populated areas in remote areas. If food, water, and shelter are not available, mountain lions may move on quickly.
- Keep garbage cans tightly sealed and compost secured.
- Supervise small children outdoors especially during the hours around dusk and dawn when mountain lions are most active.

Pet Safety
- Keep dogs and cats indoors, especially after dusk, to prevent them from becoming prey for mountain lions and other wild animals.
- Keep food away from the kitchen. If food animals outsides, gather up the food and water bowls and clean up spilled food so as not to attract wild animals.
- If you must keep pets outside, consider installing a fully secured, fenced kennel.

Livestock Safety
- When living in mountain lion habitat, confine livestock and other domestic animals in completely secured and covered enclosures or barns, particularly at night. These also include goats, sheep, chickens, and other domestic fowl.
- If you have a large herd in a relatively remote area, consider using specialized livestock guard animals.
- Install an electric fence around areas where livestock or domestic animals are kept.

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

Petitioning: Mountain Lions
- Mountain Lion Safety Tips
- Home, Pet, and Livestock Safety
- Safety When Recreating
- If You Encounter a Mountain Lion

Communication
Mountain lions communicate through visual, scent, and posturing signals, and through vocalizations such as low guttural growls, chirping, whistling, spitting, yowling, snarling, and hissing. Nursing kittens emit high-pitched, birdlike chirps and meows. Older kittens may also chirp to communicate with siblings or their mother. Mountain lions purr when together, but they cannot roar.

The most spectacular sound a mountain lion can make is a caterwaul, an eerie sound resembling a human cry or scream. Females caterwaul during mating season, especially when males are competing for the same receptive female.

Distribution & Range
Mountain lions have the largest geographic range of any native land mammal in the Western Hemisphere. They occur from British Columbia in Canada, the Western United States, and throughout Central and South America to the southern tip of Chile. California has more lion habitat than eight other states, and more than half of the state is prime mountain lion habitat. They can be found wherever deer are present including forests, wetlands, riparian areas, and deserts. They can also be found in terrain ranging from grassy savannas and rolling oak woodlands to rugged mountains.

A male mountain lion’s territory averages 100 to 200 square miles and typically encompasses all or part of the home ranges of multiple females. In California, female mountain lion ranges are usually 30 to 70 square miles in size. Depending on the location, there are typically fewer than 2 mountain lions per 100 square miles of suitable habitat.

Mountain Lion Safety Tips

Take these recommended precautions while living or recreating in mountain lion country:

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Hiking & Camping
- Ride with a partner or in a small group, and consider wearing a helmet.
- Use a bell or make noise as you go up along the trail.

Safety When Recreating
- Do not run. If you are being chased, take cover.
- Stay together in one group. If you must travel alone, take extra care.
- Never approach the mountain lion or offer it food.
- Pick up small children and place them on your shoulders.
- Face the mountain lion. Talk to it firmly and hold your ground while slowly backing away.
- If the mountain lion attacks, fight back. If you are being chased, turn to face the threat and fight back.
- If the mountain lion does not leave, do not in more attempts. If it keeps coming, take cover. Keep your hands up, but do not fight back.
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When in mountain lion country, carry bear spray, keep it accessible, and know how to use it.