

Important Mountain Lion Information

- ▶ If a mountain lion poses an immediate threat, call: **Call 911**
- ▶ To file a non-emergency wildlife report, call: **888-888-0000**

Report wildlife sightings or incidents on the CDFW online Wildlife Incident Reporting system:

apps.wildlife.ca.gov/Regions

If you find a kitten in good condition, please do not touch and do not disturb it. If you find a kitten alone in poor condition or obvious distress, do not touch and instead report to your local CDFW Office.

For more information on mountain lion safety visit the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) website:

wildlife.ca.gov/Keep-Me-Wild/Lion

California Laws Prohibit:

• Mountain Lion Hunting

It is illegal to hunt mountain lions in the state of California. It is also illegal to import mountain lion carcasses into California, even if it is legal to hunt them in other states. (CDFW Fish and Game Code 4800)

• Feeding Wildlife – Big Game

The feeding of big game animals is prohibited in California. Feeding the animals can contribute to the spread of wildlife diseases and injury, vehicle strikes of wildlife, and perpetuates human-wildlife conflicts. (CA Code of Regulations, Title 14, section 251.3)

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California Mountain Lion



Photo: Mark Elbroch

Learn about mountain lion ecology, behavior, signs, and safety tips.



Photo: Joanna Turner

California Mountain Lion

Mountain lions are also known as cougars, panthers, or pumas. Seeing a mountain lion in the wild can be a thrilling and memorable experience, but sightings are rare due to the lion's shy and elusive nature. To ensure a safe existence for both people and mountain lions, this brochure explains the ecology, behavior, ecosystem benefits, signs of the presence of mountain lions, and what to do in the event of an encounter. With a better understanding of their nature, people can safely coexist with mountain lions and help these animals remain an important part of California's landscape.

History and Legal Status

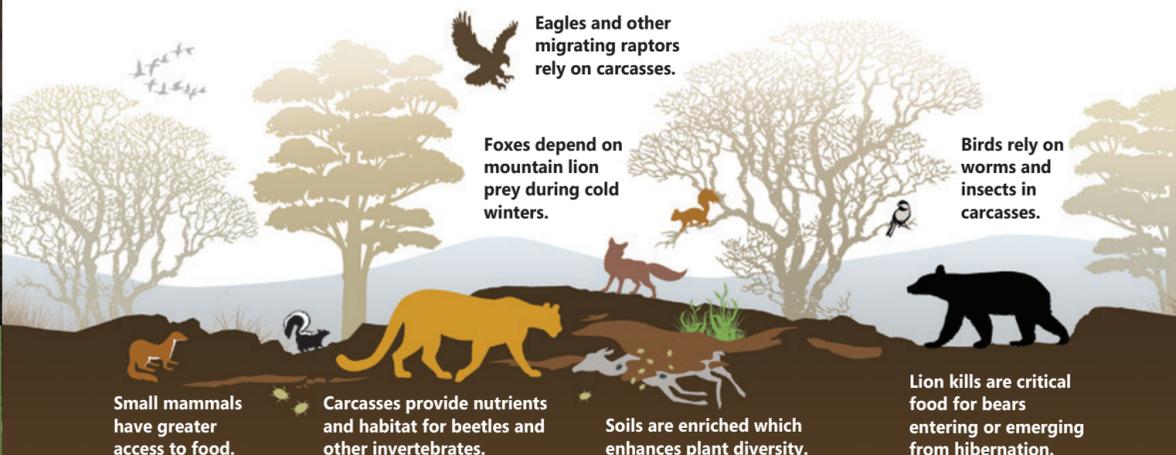
California settlers viewed the mountain lion as a threat to their livestock and livelihood. Lions were perceived as competitors for wild game and few pioneers understood their value or ecological purpose. From 1907-1963 bounty hunting programs were implemented which resulted in the killing of thousands of mountain lions. California voters passed Proposition 117 in 1990, which banned the hunting of mountain lions and established them as a "specially protected mammal." Today, a lion may still be killed by law enforcement or by any member of the public if it is threatening or attacking a person. If a mountain lion harms pets or livestock, the property owner may request a depredation permit from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to take action to reduce possible future conflicts. For more information, visit:

wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Mountain-Lion.

Ecosystem Benefits

Mountain lions inhabit much of California. They prey primarily on deer and their kills provide an important food source to many species, including other mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Nutrients from carcasses enrich soils and benefit many plants. Because of this, the connections within and between diverse ecological communities are enhanced and strengthened when mountain lions are present.

Mountain Lions Increase an Ecosystem's Health and Biodiversity



Frequently Asked Questions About Mountain Lions

How many mountain lions live in California?



Photo: Maurice Homocher

It is difficult to accurately assess statewide mountain lion populations. From year to year, mountain lion populations may increase, decrease, or remain stable. However, research is underway to estimate populations and monitor their trends in order to try and answer this question.

Do mountain lions live alone or in groups?

Mountain lions have long been considered to be solitary, but recent research shows they can be quite social. Two mountain lions may be seen together usually for the purpose of mating or hunting. Kittens stay with their mother until they are 13 to 24 months old, and may appear to be as large as their mother, giving the impression of a group of adult mountain lions. Mountain lion mothers have even been known to adopt orphaned kittens, and occasionally share meals with other mountain lions. Siblings can remain together for a period of time after leaving their mother and striking out on their own.

Do mountain lions overpopulate?

No. Mountain lions need sufficient habitat and prey to survive. There are usually about 4 mountain lions per 100 square miles. Males are highly territorial and may kill one another for territory, food, or a mate. Kittens stay with their mother for up to 2 years, in litters of just 2 or 3, so reproduction rates are low. Today, populations are also reduced by habitat loss, fire, drought, poisons, pollution, road kills, disease, poaching, and depredation permits.

Does a mountain lion sighting mean there are more in the area?

No. An increase in mountain lion sightings does not necessarily mean that the local population has increased. Nor is presence around a neighborhood generally considered evidence of unusual behavior. Mountain lions can travel long distances, often 10 to 12 miles per day, and inhabit large geographic areas. Local mountain lions may periodically wander or travel through a neighborhood as they patrol their home ranges, and young mountain lions from elsewhere may pass through in search of an open territory. If you see a mountain lion in your neighborhood, it doesn't mean it is residing there.

What do mountain lions eat?

Mountain lions are *obligate carnivores*, meaning that they only eat meat. In California, they specialize primarily on *ungulates*, mostly deer. Occasionally mountain lions will eat elk, wild pigs, rabbits, raccoons, beavers, porcupines, rodents, bighorn sheep, coyotes, and many other wildlife species.



Photo: Ken Logan

Do mountain lions reduce their prey populations?

Mountain lions co-evolved with their prey over millennia, and there is no evidence that predation by mountain lions limits prey populations. There are rare situations where mountain lions impact the growth of a prey population, particularly when prey numbers are already at critically low levels. However, the populations and availability of ungulate prey typically determines the abundance of mountain lions within a particular region. Other factors that more likely contribute to deer and elk declines include habitat loss, hunting, weather, road kills, and poaching.

Do mountain lions prey on pets and livestock?



Photo: Joanna Turner

Rarely. Weather, disease, coyotes, dogs, and birthing complications cause most livestock losses. Domestic sheep, goats and chickens are far more vulnerable to mountain lion predation than are cattle and horses, and

are more easily protected. Securing backyard goats, sheep, pigs, and chickens in predator proof enclosures from dusk to dawn will reduce livestock loss. Find out more about protecting livestock: [NEED WEBSITE](#)

Will killing more mountain lions decrease conflicts with pets and livestock?

Generally, no. The death of a single mountain lion creates a vacant territory that other mountain lions will try to occupy. Killing adult mountain lions disrupts the social structure of a local population, creating a younger population with a higher percentage of males. Conflicts with people and livestock are more common with young male lions as they move into empty home ranges to survive. Thus, killing a mountain lion may result in a temporary increase in the number of local mountain lions, as well as an increase in livestock losses.

Do mountain lions pose a significant threat to public safety?

No. Mountain lion attacks on people are extremely rare. Mountain lions are timid and mostly avoid people. However, like any wildlife species, mountain lions can be unpredictable, therefore people who live, work, or recreate in mountain lion habitat should take precautions to reduce their risk, and know what to do if they encounter a mountain lion.



Photo: Steven Bobzien

Mountain Lion Signs

You may never see a mountain lion in the wild, but you can find and interpret the signs a mountain lion leaves behind. Local conditions and the passage of time make accurate identification difficult even for expert trackers.

Tracks

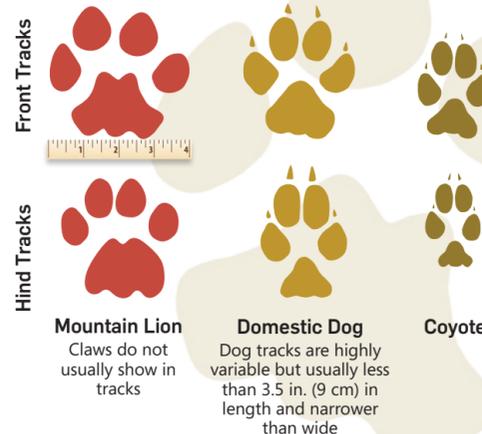
Mountain lion tracks have 4 toes on both the front and hind paws with a M-shaped heel pad that has 2 lobes at the top and 3 lobes at the base. Retractable claws do not show in the tracks of mountain lions except on slippery or difficult terrain where they need more traction or where they have sprinted after prey. A mountain lion carries its heavy tail in a wide U-shape at a normal walk, so the lower portion of its tail can leave drag marks behind in snow.



Photo: © Justin Dellinger

	Adult Males	Adult Females
Track Width	4–5 in. (9–13 cm)	< 3.5 in. (5–8 cm)
Heel Pad	> 2 in. (9–13 cm)	< 2 in. (4–6.5 cm)
Stride Length	> 40 in. (9–11.5 cm)	< 40 in. (4.5–7.5 cm)

Note: When observing tracks, recognize that considerable experience and additional indicators may be needed to make accurate conclusions about the species of the animal.



Scats

Mountain lions generally cover their scats (feces) with loose soil. Scats tend to be dense and segmented, blunt at both ends, and 1 to 1.5 inches in diameter and 4 to 6 inches long (roughly the size of those left behind by a large dog). Scats may include hair, bones, and teeth from prey, and sometimes grass, but usually contain no fruit or other vegetation. Mountain lions leave their scats along trails, under overhangs, in caves, and near kills and scrapes. Smaller mountain lion scats may be similar in size and shape to those left by bobcats.



Photo: © Justin Dellinger

Scrapes

Mountain lions make scrapes to communicate their presence, attract a mate, avoid other lions, or define the edge of their territory. They make scrapes by using their hind feet to push up a mound of leaves, dirt, or other debris in conspicuous places, at junctions in canyons, and along trails and ridge lines. Occasionally mountain lions urinate or defecate on the scrape. Bobcats make similar, but smaller, scrapes.



Photo: Brian Kertson, WDFW

Cache Sites

Mountain lions typically drag large kills to a secluded sites so they can return and continue to feed over several days. This is known as a cache. You might see a drag mark near a fresh kill. Mountain lions often cover the prey with leaves, grasses, pine needles, or branches to hide it from scavengers and to prevent it from spoiling. Mountain lions may stay close to the cache site, so it is important not to approach or linger near a dead animal. If you come across a carcass in the middle of a trail or out in the open, it's very unlikely to be a mountain lion kill.



Photo: Tomi Ruth

Learn more about mountain lions and safety on the inside poster. ▶