

## 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. Most of the attacks were by young lions, perhaps forced out to hunt on their own and not yet living in established areas. Young lions may key on easy prey, like pets and small children.

No studies have been done to learn what to do if you meet a lion. But based on observations by people who have come upon lions, some patterns of behavior and response are beginning to emerge. Therefore, the following suggestions may be helpful. Remember every situation is different with respect to the lion, the terrain, the people and their activity.

- 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. Make sure children are close to you and within your sight at all times. Talk with children about lions and teach them what to do if they meet one.

- 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.

- STAY CALM when you come upon a lion. Talk calmly yet firmly to it. Move slowly.

- 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. Open your jacket if you're wearing one. If you have small children with you, protect them by picking them up. so they won't panic and run. If the lion is aggressive, 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. What you want to do is convince the lion you are not prey and that you may be a danger to the lion.

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



## For More Information

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

If you have an encounter with a lion or an attack occurs, contact the Department of Wildlife, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. After hours, contact the Nevada Highway Patrol or your local Sheriff's Department. To report a sighting, please contact the Department during normal business hours. Your information is very valuable to us.

## Additional Information

For the most part, people and wildlife can coexist. Coexisting with wildlife is an enjoyable part of living in Nevada. The key is to respect the "wildness" of wildlife. You can learn more about lions by reading any of the following books.

"A Critical Review of Literature on Puma." 1983, by A. E. Anderson, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Special Report #54.

"America's Great Cats," 1986, by Gary Turbak and Alan Carey, Northland Press, Flagstaff, AZ.

"Soul Among Lions: The Cougar as Peaceful Adversary," 1989, by Hariey G. Shaw, Johnson Books, Boulder, CO.

"The Puma: Legendary Lion of the Americas," 1987 by J.B. Tinstey, Texas Western Press, El Paso, TX.

"The Wonder Series: Mountain Lion, A Story and Activities" by Sandra Chisholm Robinson, Denver Museum of Natural History, CO.

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## Living With Mountain Lions in Nevada



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## Nevada Is Mountain Lion Country

Much of Nevada is prime mountain lion country. This simple fact is a surprise to many residents and visitors. These large, powerful predators have always lived here, preying primarily on 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, you can coexist with these magnificent animals.

## What We Know About Mountain Lions

The mountain lion, also known as cougar, panther or puma, exists only in the Western Hemisphere and is North America's second biggest cat. In Nevada the mountain lion population exceeds 2,000 animals. A lion's natural life span is approximately 12-15 years in the wild, and up to 25 years in captivity. Lions are very powerful and usually kill large animals, such as deer, elk and wild horses. Natural enemies include other large predators such as bears, other lions and wolves. They also fall victim to accidents, disease and road hazards.

The status of the mountain lion in Nevada evolved from that of "noxious animal" for which a \$5 bounty was offered in 1873, to a designation as a big game species in 1965. The change in legal status reflected growing public appreciation and concern for sound mountain lion management.

## Physical Appearance

The mountain lion's scientific name, *Felis concolor*, means "cat of one color." Mountain lions in Nevada are usually tawny or tan to reddish in color with black-tipped ears and tail.

Mountain lions vary in size and weight, with males being larger than females. Adult males may be more than eight feet in length and average 140 pounds. Adult females may be up to seven feet long and weigh an average of 100 pounds.

Mountain lions are easily distinguished from other wild cat species in Nevada. Lions are much larger than bobcats and have long tails, 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.

The mountain lion is a solitary animal. Adult males usually travel alone. If tracks suggest two or more lions traveling together, it's probably a female with kittens.

## Habitat

The mountain lion's habitat ranges from desert chaparral and badlands to subalpine mountains and tropical rain forests.

In Nevada, lions are found in areas of pinion pine, juniper, mountain mahogany, ponderosa pine and mountain brush. Lions generally will be most abundant in areas where deer are plentiful.

Individual lions range in areas varying in size from 10 to 370 square miles. Females with young kittens use the smallest areas; adult males occupy the largest areas.

Size of the mountain lions home range depends on the terrain and how much food is available. In Nevada male home ranges can be as large as 115 square miles. Female ranges are much smaller and average about 25 square miles. Lions may overlap home ranges, but some lions may defend their territory against other mountain lions.

## Hunting and Feeding Habits

Lions are most active from dusk to dawn, although they travel and hunt in daylight. Lions primarily eat deer; however, they also kill elk, porcupines, small mammals, wild horses, livestock and pets.

Mountain lions prefer to kill their own prey. Like most cats, they take their prey by stalking or ambush rather than by a long pursuit. After spotting prey, a lion stalks using available cover, then attacks with a rush, often from behind.

Lions usually kill with a powerful bite below the base of the skull, breaking the neck. Lions drag the carcass to a sheltered spot beneath a tree or overhang 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.

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

In Nevada mountain lions are hunted year-round. An average of 589 tags are issued each year, with 106 animals harvested.

## Mating and Breeding

Female lions generally reproduce when they are about two and a half years old.

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

Breeding takes place throughout the year in Nevada. The peak birth months range from April through July. The gestation period is three months.

## Birth To Maturity

The female gives birth to an average of two-to-three young, called kittens. She usually chooses a secluded spot beneath an uprooted tree, cave or rocky depression. Care of the kittens rests solely with the female. She defends them vigorously against male lions, which may kill them.

Newborn kittens are about one foot long and weigh about one 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 two months.

Kittens learn hunting skills through play, 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 30 pounds and are becoming capable hunters. Kittens remain with their mother for another year, improving their hunting skills.

## How to Live in Mountain Lion Country

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:

- Make lots of noise if you come and go during the times mountain lions are active, dusk to dawn.
- Install outside lighting. Light areas where you walk so you could see a lion if one were present.
- Closely supervise children whenever they play outdoors. Make sure children are inside before dusk and not outside before dawn. Talk with children about lions and teach them what to do if they meet one.
- Landscape or remove vegetation to eliminate hiding places for lions, especially around children's play areas. Make it difficult for lions to approach unseen.
- DONT FEED ANY WILDLIFE! Planting non-native shrubs and plants that deer often prefer to eat encourages wildlife to come onto your property. Predators follow prey.
- Keep your pet 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 eaten by mountain lions. Store all garbage securely.
- Place livestock in enclosed sheds or barns at night. Close doors to all outside buildings 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.