

How To Avoid an Encounter

There has been very little research on how to avoid mountain lion attacks. But those that have occurred are being analyzed in the hope that some crucial questions can be answered. Did the victim do something to inadvertently provoke an attack? What should a person who is approached by a mountain lion do – or not do? The following suggestions are based on studies of mountain lion behavior and on analysis of attacks by mountain lions, tigers and leopards.

DO NOT HIKE ALONE.

Adults need to supervise children.

KEEP CHILDREN CLOSE TO YOU.

Observations of captured wild mountain lions reveal that the animals seem to be especially drawn to children. Keep children within your sight at all times.

DO NOT APPROACH OUR NATIVE CATS.

Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give them a way to escape.

DO NOT CROUCH DOWN OR BEND OVER.

In Nepal, a researcher studying tigers and leopards watched the big cats kill cattle and domestic water buffalo while ignoring humans standing nearby. He surmised that a human standing up is just not the right shape for a cat's prey. On the other hand, a person squatting or bending over looks a lot like a four-legged prey animal. If you are in mountain lion country, avoid squatting, crouching, or bending over, even when picking up children.

If You Encounter a Native Cat

DO NOT RUN FROM OUR NATIVE CATS.

Running may stimulate a mountain lion's instinct to chase. Instead, stand and face the animal. Make eye contact. If you have small children with you, pick them up if possible, so they don't panic and run. This also makes you appear larger and more intimidating to the cat. Although it may be awkward, pick them up without bending over or turning away from the mountain lion.

DO ALL YOU CAN TO APPEAR LARGER.

Raise your arms. Open your jacket if you are wearing one. Again, pick up small children. Throw stones, branches, or whatever you can reach without crouching or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice. The idea is to convince the mountain lion that you are not prey and that you may be a danger to it.

FIGHT BACK IF ATTACKED.

A hiker in Southern California used a rock to fend off a mountain lion that was attacking his son. Others have fought back successfully with sticks, caps, jackets, garden tools, and their bare hands. Since a mountain lion usually tries to bite the head or neck, try to remain standing and face the attacking animal.

**IF YOU ENCOUNTER A MOUNTAIN LION
IN THE PARKS, CALL THE RANGERS
AT (925) 960-2400.**

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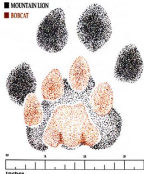


NATIVE CATS

Cats can be fascinating creatures to watch. Their behavior exhibits their innate stealth, suppleness, flexibility and power. Two native species live in our area – the Bobcat and the Mountain Lion.

■ MOUNTAIN LION

■ BOBCAT



Evasive and not often seen, our native cats leave behind evidence of their passing. Foot prints are a key in helping experts to determine was that a cat, or something else?

Mountain lion tracks measure about 3.25 inches square. A bobcat's tracks are closer to 2 inches square, roughly the size of a small dog's tracks.



Mountain Lion

Puma concolor

Common names: Cougar, puma, panther, painter, catamant, ghost cat, screamer, devil cat, silver lion

Average height: Male 30" Female 24"
Weight range: Male 130-180 lbs. Female 80-130 lbs.
Body length range: Male 4-6 ft. Female 3-5 ft.
Average tail length: Male 3 ft. Female 2 ft.

Coat color: Tawny brown generally, but ranges from grayish to yellowish to reddish brown; creamy white on chest, belly, throat, jaw, chin, and upper lip

Other features: Round, erect ears with no tufts; long, heavy tail that is dark-tipped



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THE LIFE OF A PREDATOR

Bobcats and mountain lions have overlapping ranges, but avoid conflict by respecting territorial boundaries defined by their scent marks. Both species avoid bad weather by holing up in thick brush, thickets, rocky crevices, or in caves. These predators help to keep populations of rodents, deer, and smaller mammals in balance.

Mountain lions are an important part of our local ecosystems, and are key in keeping our deer populations healthy and at appropriate levels. A lion can leap up onto a tree branch, (sometimes up to 18 feet in one bound) and then wait and watch for an opportune moment to jump down on its prey and break its neck with one powerful bite behind the skull. The lion will usually drag the meal from the kill site and eat until it is full, hiding the remainder under leaf litter or brush until the next mealtime.

Bobcats, being much smaller in size, usually eat their prey in one meal. However, if they do catch a larger prey animal, they will, like the mountain lion, cache their food for eating at a later time. Although only slightly larger than domestic cats, they are ferocious hunters and show no mercy in defending their kill from potential thieves. They often compete with coyotes for food and shelter.

Both mountain lions and bobcats are nocturnal in nature, but they are sometimes seen during the day. As cats, they spend a lot of their time sleeping, grooming themselves, stretching, and prowling around looking for food.



Bobcat

Lynx rufus

Common names: Lynx cat, bay lynx, wildcat, red lynx, barred bobcat, pallid bobcat

Average height: Male 18" Female 16"
Weight range: Male 20-22 lbs. Female 11-13 lbs.
Average body length: Male 30" Female 27"
Average tail length: Male 6" Female 5"

Coat color: Reddish-brown, gray-brown, light gray, brown, yellowish brown; brown or black spots on legs, and sometimes visible on back; white belly with black spots; back of each ear is black with a white center spot

Other features: Short black ear tufts; facial ruff or collar; short tail that is white underneath with dark bands on top

