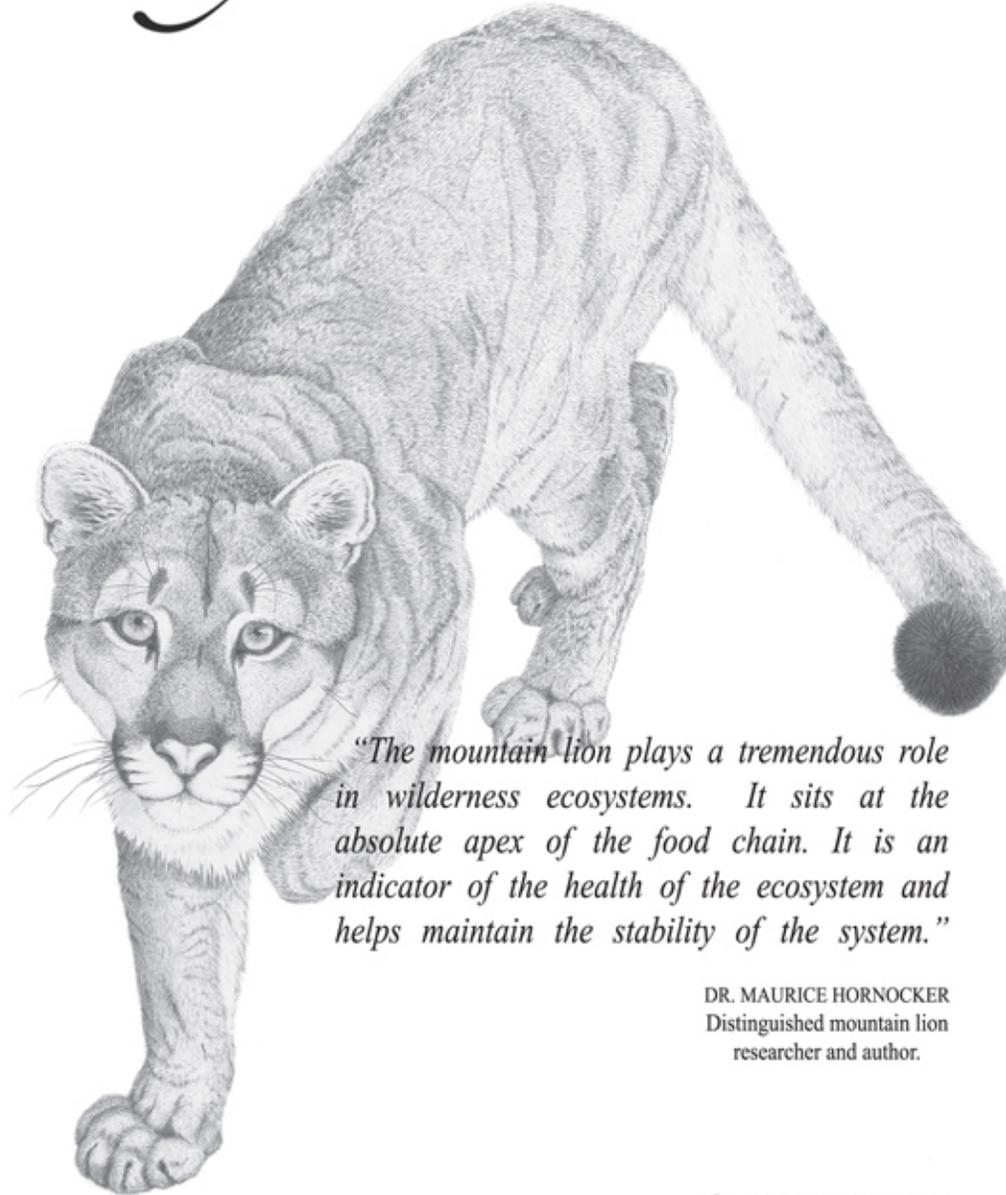


# ghost cat

M Y W O R L D



*“The mountain lion plays a tremendous role in wilderness ecosystems. It sits at the absolute apex of the food chain. It is an indicator of the health of the ecosystem and helps maintain the stability of the system.”*

DR. MAURICE HORNOCKER  
Distinguished mountain lion  
researcher and author.

## THE MOUNTAIN LION

*"The mountain lion works a strong magic in the imagination of many Americans. It is the ultimate loner, a renegade presence in the wildest canyons and wildest mountains, the sign of everything that is remote from us, everything we have not spoiled."*

DONALD SCHUELER

There are as many names as there are stories surrounding the charismatic mountain lion: Puma concolor, cougar, catamount, painter, panther, ghost cat. The mountain lion represents a vividly wild aspect of the Americas. It is one of the last remaining great predators, whose elusiveness and camouflaged coloring have enabled it to survive a fifty dollar bounty and hunting pressures continuing to the present day.\*

The mountain lion once roamed all of the Americas from the southern tip of Chile to the Canadian Yukon. With the European colonization of North America, it was hunted to extinction in regions east of the Rockies, with the exception of an endangered remnant population in Florida. Today, approximately 30,000 to 60,000 mountain lions exist in the US, and only 4,000 to 6,000 in California. Their elusiveness makes it difficult to know their exact numbers, but scientists believe there may be even fewer than these estimates.

This graceful, tawny colored cat has a small head, large body, and a long black-tipped tail. An adult weighs between 70 and 280 pounds, and measures five to nine feet from its nose to the tip of its tail (males being the larger). Large padded paws help the puma navigate through variable terrain. The paw print can be differentiated from that of a canine because its retractable claws do not appear in the tracks it

leaves behind. Its binocular vision, lightning speed, sinewy strength, and strategically placed two-inch incisors, along with its razor-sharp claws, make this obligate carnivore, whose survival depends on fresh meat, a resourceful predator.

Pumas are solitary and territorial by nature, requiring vast tracts of contiguous land with ample prey and viable corridors connecting their populations. These large parcels of land and movement pathways enable them to disperse, find mates, raise their young and maintain genetic diversity. Their home ranges have been recorded from 10 to 400 square miles. Encroaching developments often divide and fragment puma habitat, splitting their home ranges and populations, resulting in additional sightings by humans.

The cougar plays a vital role in the ecosystem. They control deer, elk and other ungulate populations and also keep their hoofed prey on the move, thus preventing overgrazing. They often remove the weaker and diseased individuals, helping support healthy herds. These regulatory roles have a cascading effect on the entire food chain, designating the lion as a keystone species, one that helps maintain the delicate ecological balance. In addition, these top predators preserve the vitality of a living, breathing ecological community by leaving behind the remains of their prey. While deer are its principal food source, the puma is an opportunistic carnivore, eating everything from mouse to moose. Scavengers such as birds, skunks, bears, coyotes and foxes, all the way down to the smallest microorganisms, all capitalize upon the remains of a cougar kill.

We need to act now to preserve mountain lion habitat and in

so doing a myriad of other species would be saved in the process. Once a species is added to the endangered list, hindsight sends us scampering to save it, always at a great expense and often with little success. Because pumas require large habitats, preserving their land and connecting corridors would also preserve that of the bear, the elk, birds, fish, frogs and an infinite number of other species.

At first glance, it may appear that an abundance of wildlands still exists, but a closer scrutiny reveals a different picture. With persistent development and the exponential growth of human populations, the next 100 years may well see the mountain lion on the verge of becoming yet another bygone predator, without which the environment, along with humanity, would suffer a great and irreplaceable loss. This great cat's power and mystery embody the very spirit of our land and signify the grandeur of nature itself. The puma is a wild, threatened, and ethereal symbol, and our missteps are mirrored in its suffering. It serves as a teacher and a beacon for humanity, reminding us of where we are going, where we have been, and ultimately, the direction in which we need to proceed with the ambition of securing a future for all life.

\*Idaho was the first state to rescind its bounty program in 1958. Arizona did not repeal its mountain lion bounty program until 1990. California is the only state to ban hunting mountain lions for sport. This ban in California has been in effect since 1990. Depredations permits can be obtained to kill lions that destroy livestock or pets.

## CHANCES ARE...

Wherever you live presents a different challenge. In the city, you learn to be street smart. In rural areas, you need to be wildlife savvy. It is important to put it all in perspective.

- Since 1890 there have been only 20 fatal attacks in the US and Canada. Fifty-seven percent of those occurred in British Columbia, even while mountain lion hunting is legal there.
- You are 40,000 times more likely to die in a motorcycle crash than be killed by a mountain lion.
- You are 4,000 times more likely to drown than killed by a mountain lion.
- You are 1,500 times more likely to be killed by a firearm than by a mountain lion..
- You are 50 times more likely to be killed by lightning than by a mountain lion.
- You are 10 times more likely to be killed by a domestic dog than by a mountain lion.
- It is more dangerous to walk the streets of any US city at night than it is to live and hike in mountain lion country.

## LIVING AND RECREATING IN MOUNTAIN LION COUNTRY\*

Keep yourself – and mountain lions – out of harm’s way.

- Trim vegetation from around your house where cougars might find cover.
- Install outdoor lighting, preferably motion sensor lights in the most heavily trafficked areas.
- Do not leave food out to attract deer or other wildlife.
- Remove plants that attract deer, raccoons, etc. More deer means more mountain lions. In more rural parts of the country, birdseed may attract animals that mountain lions might prey upon.
- Keep pets and pet food inside at night, and make sure you know where they are during the day – they make easy prey. This will protect them from coyotes and bobcats as well.
- Fence livestock and keep them contained in secure enclosures with a roof especially at night.
- Supervise children if they see a lion, particularly during dusk and dawn, when mountain lions are most active. Educate them about what to do if they see a cougar.
- Avoid hiking, biking, or running alone.

- If alone, consider carrying pepper spray or mace and a walking stick.
- Keep children in front of you and close by.
- Make noise.
- Never approach a puma of any size, especially a kitten.
- Never approach a wildlife carcass.
- Avoid recreating between dusk and dawn when lions are most likely looking for prey. Trim vegetation from around your house where cougars might find cover.

### IF YOU SEE A MOUNTAIN LION\*

- Consider it a privilege, **but...** Do not approach the lion.
- Keep in mind only 15% of all mountain lion sightings have been substantiated.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Do not turn your back or run as this may trigger their instinct to chase. Stay calm! Do not act like prey.
- Appear as big and threatening as possible.

- Never turn your back. Give the mountain lion room to run away. Do not corner it.
- Maintain eye contact and back away slowly if it's possible and safe to do so, or move to one side to give the cougar adequate room to leave.
- Pull children close to you and pick them up without crouching down.
- If the lion acts aggressively, throw rocks, sticks, water bottles, backpacks, and any heavy objects available to you without bending down.
- Speak loudly and firmly. Wave your arms and clap your hands above your head.
- Fight back if attacked targeting nose and eyes. Do not play dead or lie down.
- If you believe the encounter to be a valid public safety concern, report your sighting to your state and game agencies and any local wildlife organizations.

\*Courtesy of:  
 Felidae Conservation Fund  
 The Mountain Lion Foundation  
 The Cougar Fund

## KEEPING YOUR PETS AND LIVESTOCK SAFE

- Visit the Mountain Lion Foundation's website to learn more about animal husbandry, predator aversion techniques, and secure livestock enclosures:

[http://mountainlion.org/pets\\_and\\_livestock\\_landing.asp](http://mountainlion.org/pets_and_livestock_landing.asp)

- If you opt to build fences, remember to contain only the areas necessary to keep livestock safe. Do not fence your entire property, as wildlife such as mountain lions need corridors to allow them to move freely between large tracts of land.
- Don't fence out water sources for wildlife.

## BE VISIONARY MAKE A DIFFERENCE

*"The most critical conservation issue facing mountain lions and other large mammal populations in this generation will be habitat loss and fragmentation due to development and other land uses that conflict with wildlife and their migration patterns [and genetic diversity]."*

STEVEN G. TORRES  
 DFG Wildlife Biologist

Theodore Roosevelt had the foresight to create five national parks before the first decade of the 1900's had come to a close. His visionary achievements, in a time when our nation's population was only a fraction of what it is today, should serve as an inspiration to current generations.

We must initiate our own farsighted movements to protect and preserve our land for our children and our children's children. Support organizations that work to protect cougars, cougar habitat and their corridors. Only 2% of all donations are directed toward environmental causes, and of that 2%, only 0.28% is actually employed in the conservation of habitat. Your donations are especially critical.

- *The Nature Conservancy*  
[www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)  
(Designate your donation to land acquisition for viable puma habitat.)
- *Felidae Conservation Fund*  
[www.felidaefund.org](http://www.felidaefund.org)  
(Designate your donation to puma education and research.)
- *Wildlands Network*  
[www.twp.org](http://www.twp.org)  
(Designate your donation to viable puma connectivity corridors.)
- *The Wilderness Society*  
[www.wilderness.org](http://www.wilderness.org)  
(Designate your donation to support efforts to protect and enhance wildlands for viable puma habitat.)
- *The Mountain Lion Foundation*  
[www.mountainlion.org](http://www.mountainlion.org)  
(Designate your donation to puma education.)
- *The Cougar Fund*  
[www.cougarfund.org](http://www.cougarfund.org)  
(Designate your donation to puma education.)

Inspire your friends and others to do the same...

For a gallery of Michelle Friend's artwork, exhibition and publication dates and more resources concerning mountain lion preservation, visit [www.ghostcatmyworld.com](http://www.ghostcatmyworld.com)



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