

Lions and People

Mountain lions will generally avoid humans. Most people will never get even a brief glimpse of a mountain lion, and lion attacks on people are extremely rare. There have been fewer than a dozen human fatalities in North America in more than 100 years. The number of mountain lion/human interactions has been increasing in recent years, largely because more people are living and recreating in areas where lions live.

Here are some general guidelines about living and recreating in lion country. Remember that every situation is different with respect to the lion, the terrain, the people and their activity.



Living In Lion Country

- Don't feed wildlife. By feeding deer, javelina, raccoons and other wildlife, you can also attract mountain lions which prey upon them. This may also cause lions to lose their fear of humans. Store garbage securely, and put it out only on the morning of trash pick-up.

- Take pet precautions. When visiting lion country, keep pets on a leash and under your control at all times. Roaming pets are easy prey. Bring pets indoors at night, or keep them in a secure kennel with a secure top. Keep your pets in a secure yard during the day. Don't feed pets outdoors because uneaten food will attract other animals that lions may prey upon.

- Walk, jog or hike in groups. Make 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.

- Supervise children. When you're out in lion country, keep children close and in sight. Make sure they are indoors before dusk and not outside before dawn. Make sure they know what to do if they encounter a lion.

If You Encounter a Lion

- Stay calm. NEVER run from a mountain lion. Running can stimulate a lion's predator response — *to chase and attack*. Pick up children so they do not panic and run. Although it may be awkward, pick them up without bending over or turning away from the mountain lion.

- Stop or slowly back away. Face the lion, stand upright and speak firmly to the lion. Make eye contact. Do not approach the lion; leave it a way to escape from you.

- Make yourself look bigger. Don't act in a threatening manner, but show the lion you are not prey. Wave your arms over your head. Open your jacket if you're wearing one.

- Fight back if lion is aggressive. Throw rocks, sticks or anything you can reach without crouching or bending down. If the lion attacks, fight back with whatever you have — rocks, binoculars, bare hands — but try to remain standing.

- Report all lion encounters. If you are involved in a face-to-face encounter or are attacked by a mountain lion, contact the nearest office of the Arizona Game and Fish Department. The threat to public safety will be assessed and appropriate action will be taken.



TRACKS OF A LION

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, resulting in a distinctive "M" shape. Generally, claw marks are not visible since their claws are retractable.

Dog or coyote tracks may be similar in size, but will usually have obvious claw marks. Most lion tracks are only 3 to 3.5 inches wide while many large dogs make a track greater than four inches. Dog tracks usually only have two distinct lobes present at the base of the pad.

GENERAL LION INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Adults weigh 70 to 165 pounds and are 5.5 to 7.5 feet in length (including 1.5- to 3-foot tail). They are 26 to 31 inches high at the shoulder. Females are smaller than males, both in length and weight. Adults are typically uniformly tawny to grayish overall. Kittens are spotted.

DISTRIBUTION

Mountain lions are found from southern Canada to southern South America. Although they have been largely eliminated from the eastern U.S., mountain lions are found statewide in Arizona, though they are much less common in the southwestern corner.

HABITAT

Mountain lions are most commonly found in rocky foothills, canyons, and mountains. They're found from low elevation deserts to high elevation conifer forests.

BIOLOGY

Mountain lions are typically a secretive and elusive animal and are at or near the top of the food chain. They prey mainly on deer and other medium to small mammals, but also on elk, desert tortoises, and a variety of other wildlife, livestock, and domestic animals. Kills are usually cached (covered with scraped-up vegetation and leaf litter), with the lion returning several times to feed.

A mountain lion's home range can span more than 100 square miles. Where suitable habitat exists, ten or so animals may occupy the same 100 square miles, and individual home ranges may overlap considerably. Wanderers may turn up almost anywhere. Dispersing individuals may move 100 miles or more from their natal grounds.

They are usually nocturnal, hunting alone at night, but they may be active at any time. They do not hibernate.

Mountain lions are capable of breeding at 2 or 3 years of age. They mate only briefly, not for life. After about 90 days of gestation, the female bears two to six kittens (usually two). Most young are born in spring to midsummer. The young stay with the female for a year, sometimes two, as they learn to hunt. Females breed every two or three years.

STATUS

Mountain lions are not an endangered species. In Arizona, lions are classified as big game with a statewide population estimated at between 2,500 and 3,000.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS

Its needs are few: sufficient habitat to support healthy prey populations, and sufficient wild country to afford minimal contact with humans, livestock and other domestic animals. Movement corridors between backcountry habitats are essential for genetic diversity. Education is needed to help humans recognize the valuable ecological role played by mountain lions and the relatively low threat they pose to humans.

The Arizona Game & Fish Department receives many calls every year from concerned citizens with questions about mountain lions in Arizona. If you have further questions or concerns, don't hesitate to call the Department. We are also interested in hearing about lion sightings and encounters with humans. If you encounter a lion, call the nearest office of the Arizona Game and Fish Department or the Operation Game Thief toll-free telephone number at 1-800-352-0700.



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Living With Mountain Lions In Arizona



**Arizona
Game and Fish
Department**