

Times News - Tamaqua

October 13, 2007

[Looking for a Nittany Lion?](#)

Cougars have been extinct in Pennsylvania for over a century

By AL ZAGOFISKY azagofsk@ptd.net



*EASTERN COUGAR
FOUNDATION Female cougars
have litters of two to three
kittens every two to three years
beginning at the age of 2-1/2. At
six months of age, the kittens
weigh 30 - 40 pounds. They
leave the den at this time,
accompanying the female to her
kills and occasionally hunting
with her.*

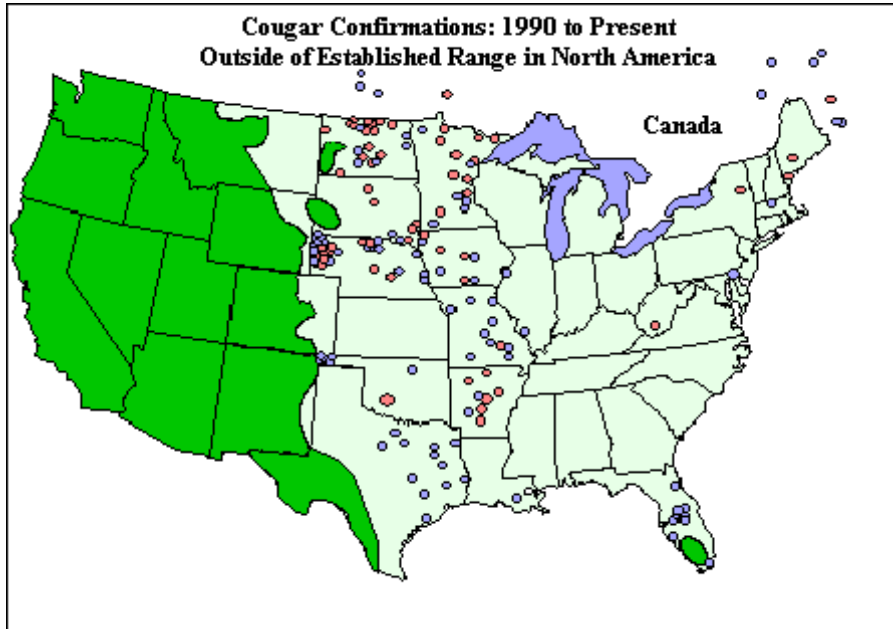
If you see a Nittany lion, what should you do?

More likely than not, you should get your eyes examined-for mountain lions have not roamed the mountains of Nittany nor any part of Pennsylvania since the 1880s. Still there are sightings.

While there is the exceptional mountain lion that escapes from a zoo or a private collection, there has been little evidence of these feral canines in Pennsylvania for well over a century. Still reports persist.

According to consulting forester and cougar researcher Kerry Gyekis, people are reporting sightings of mountain lions-also known as cougar, puma, mountain lion, panther, painter, and catamount. Unless there is tangible evidence such as a photograph, tracks or scat, he is reluctant to believe the person making the report.

At a presentation at the Beltzville Lake State Park Environmental Education Center, Gyekis - an officer with the Eastern Cougar Foundation showed a series of photographs that people had sent him that were supposedly taken of cougars in Pennsylvania. Many were fuzzy, or were taken at night, and Gyekis pointed out that they were more likely to be of a bobcat, house cat, or even of a deer, than that of a cougar.



THE COUGAR NETWORK www.cougarnet.org The green area of the map is the current habitat of the cougar. The dots indicate sightings in other parts of the U.S. According to consulting forester and cougar researcher Kerry Gyekis, people are reporting sightings of mountain lions in Pennsylvania, but unless there is tangible evidence such as a photograph, tracks or scat, he is reluctant to believe the accuracy of the report.



Cougar researcher Joe Lankalis demonstrates how the cougar uses its teeth to make in instantaneous kill by

severing the spine of its prey. He is assisted by Beltzville Lake State Park Environmental Educator Carissa Reilly-Longo.

AL ZAGOFFSKY/TIMES NEWS

At the time, Europeans came to America, the cougar ranged throughout the continental United States. Through hunting of the cougar and the extinction of its prey of elk and deer from Pennsylvania around 1880, the cougar no longer roamed in the state. Excepting for the Florida Everglades, there have been few confirmed sightings in the Eastern U.S, although the cougar is found over much of the Western United States.

The cougar is a large, tawny, long-tailed cat native to the New World. It was unknown in Europe, Asia or Africa. Settlers to America saw it, along with wolves, as predators-they feared it and killed it.

At first, settlers thought cougars were African lions or leopards. Only gradually, over a period of about a century, did Americans realize that the cougar was a distinct species. Cougar folklore combined European ideas about predators with Native American knowledge, often mixing psychological fantasy with biological fact.

Even after the cougars were believed to have become extirpated in Pennsylvania, cougar sightings in remote areas never completely ceased. By the 1960s, sightings had increased to the point that the Eastern cougar was believed to be possibly still existing and was listed on the first Endangered Species Act in 1973. An official U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service search for cougar signs in the late 1970s and early 1980s turned up several likely scats, but technology available at that time could not confirm them as cougar and no other confirming evidence was found.

Adult male cougars weigh between 75 and 175 pounds with the largest wild specimen tipping the scales at 278 pounds. Including a tail that runs from two to three feet long, these cats can have a length of between five and nine feet.

Females have litters of two to three kittens every two to three years beginning at the age of 2-1/2. At six months of age, the kittens weigh 30 - 40 pounds. They leave the den at this time, accompanying the female to her kills and occasionally hunting with her.



presentation, Kerry Gyekis - an officer with the Eastern Cougar Foundation showed a series of photographs people had sent him that were supposedly taken of cougars in Pennsylvania. Many were fuzzy, or were taken at night. Gyekis pointed out that they were more likely to be of a bobcat, house cat, or even of a deer, than that of a cougar.

*AL ZAGOFSKY/TIMES NEWS
During a Beltzville Lake State
Park Environmental
Education Center*

A young male may leave at one year of age, but most remain until they are nearly two. The average cougar's lifespan is eight years. Adult cougars have no natural enemies, only man with his hunting dogs, and with his automobile.

Cougars are powerful animals that prefer deer and make their own kills. They only eat meat, and only fresh meat. An attempt to kill cougars by leaving poison meat failed, because they are not scavengers. They are territorial and have been known to range from 25 square miles in California to 1,000 square miles in Texas.

Encounters with cougars are rare and attacks are extremely rare. If you come upon a cougar, stand tall and stare at it. Its habit is to attack prey from the rear. Facing it sends a message that you are not prey.