

BEYOND SIGHTINGS

Sightings aren't accepted as scientific evidence because they can't be proven. The real value of a sighting is to lead you to physical field evidence that can be analyzed. Why is conclusive proof needed? To convince state & federal wildlife agencies to begin educational & safety programs that will help people live with recovering populations of these large native cats.

COLLECTING FIELD SIGN

Always carry with you into the field:

- *Camera & a quarter for size reference: place coin beside tracks, kills, scrapes, & other signs before snapping a photo. Always take photos before disturbing any sign you find.*
- *Plastic baggies - for scat (droppings). Do not touch scat with bare hands to avoid parasites. As soon as possible:*
 - *Dry scat thoroughly in a paper (breathable) bag in an oven no hotter than 150' F, & store in an insect proof container;*
 - *Or, freeze immediately in a deep freeze (thaw cycles in refrigerator freezers degrade DNA). This is less convenient for shipping.*
- *Plaster of Paris, plastic collar cut from gallon milk jug to place around tracks & bottle for water to mix - to make plaster casts of tracks.*
- *GPS unit (if available, but not essential) or topo map – to record location of evidence.*

Label all items immediately with date, location where found, & your name & address. Never send the original negatives or plaster casts away for analysis, or more than half of any scat. If you collect what you believe is cougar sign, contact the Eastern Cougar Foundation for DNA and other forms of expert analysis.

EASTERN COUGAR FOUNDATION

A non-profit, science-based, volunteer-run educational organization for the recovery of cougars in the East. The ECF accepts only written documentation from reputable authorities or ground-truthed photographs and videos as confirmation of cougars.

LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES REMOTE CAMERA PROJECT

In the winter of 2006-2007, Judy Tipton and Dana Hunt set out 28 remote cameras in the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area (LBL) in western Kentucky and Tennessee. This unique 170,00-acre area is bounded on the west, east and north by two impounded rivers which isolate the area on all sides except the southern end. All human inhabitants had been moved out of LBL by the 1960s. Today it is used for recreation and wildlife habitat. There have been many purported sightings by professionals over the years, and LBL is not far from confirmed reports in Missouri and Illinois. We thank the US Forest Service for their assistance.



Dana with PhotoScout remote camera setup



Coyote attracted by Canine Call scent lure

JOIN THE EASTERN COUGAR FOUNDATION

The Eastern Cougar Foundation advocates restoration of viable cougar populations in suitable areas of the eastern and central United States through natural recolonization. We advocate the protection of undeveloped areas for cougars and other wildlife, such as lynx and wolves, and the designation and establishment of connections between such areas. We enlist volunteer members in our search for evidence of cougars in the field. We educate people on basic cougar biology and how to co-exist with our magnificent native big cat. One or more public attitude surveys are planned.

Your dues and donations assist our volunteers with expenses entailed in setting out remote cameras and "hair snares" in promising areas. They help volunteers and students attend conferences and training sessions. We have also given financial assistance to student projects. Members receive a quarterly newsletter. Visit www.easterncougar.org for more information, to join online, and to purchase books, T shirts, the 2004 Eastern Cgr Conference Proceedings, and other items.

Dues are \$15.00 per year, students \$5.00 per year

Mail checks made out to Eastern Cougar Foundation, c/o Helen McGinnis, PO Box 300, Harman, WV 26270—or join online.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State & Zip Code _____

Email Address _____

Newsletter Preference-Email ___ Snail Mail ___



Wild male photographed in the Black Hills of South Dakota, June 2, 2007 by Scott Weins

LIVING WITH

COUGARS

IN

EASTERN

NORTH AMERICA

Revised June 2007

The Eastern Cougar Foundation

c/o Helen McGinnis
PO Box 300
Harman, WV 26270

www.easterncougar.org

History

Cougars (*Puma concolor*) are also known as mountain lions, pumas, panthers and catamounts. Next to native peoples, they were the most widespread mammal in the Western Hemisphere when Europeans arrived, bringing with them their strong bias against wolves and other large predators. Wolves and cougars were shot on sight, and bounties were offered.. The settlers also reveled in the opportunity to hunt deer--in Europe, only nobles had hunting privileges. Deer populations were decimated or completely extirpated. With their natural prey eliminated, large predators had no option but to prey on livestock, stepping up the settlers' war against them. As early as the 1850s, cougars had presumably been eliminated from the New England states, and by the 1930s only a few survived in the swamps of southern Florida. But people continued to report seeing them. **All cougars east of the Mississippi River are listed as endangered and may not be harmed.** A few have been confirmed by physical evidence. Although most sightings are cases of mistaken identity, some are probably valid. These widely scattered cats may be remnant natives; escaped/released captives; migrants from known populations in Florida or the West or a mix of all three. Origins are irrelevant if the animals can adapt and survive in the wild. Cougars play a crucial role in balancing the ecosystem, and are a measure of healthy landscapes.



Mounted Anson Panther, Last Wild Cougar Documented in PA, 1874. Photo by Joseph A. Lankalis

Cougar Biology

DESCRIPTION: Males average 140 lbs. & 7 feet from nose to tail tip; females smaller. Brown to grey above, whitish below. Kittens are born with spots that gradually fade.

PREDATION: Deer are preferred. Adults kill about one deer per week. Cougars are stalkers, using cover to get close to their prey and seize it after a final rush. They capture vulnerable deer and elk that either are unwary or located where a cougar can sneak up close. Depending on complex circumstances, cougars may or may not reduce deer numbers. If habitat is already at carrying capacity—deer are small, don't breed their first year and have few fawns--eliminating cougars will not increase deer numbers. In fact, cougar predation will benefit the deer herd and its habitat. They definitely don't prefer trophy bucks!

POPULATION GROWTH: Biologists call cougars "self-regulating" because they keep their own numbers low. When the habitat is filled to capacity, young cougars must leave in search of new homes or risk being killed by adults. Most young cougars may die without reproducing.

HOME RANGE depends on availability of prey, terrain, and existence of other cougars. No breeding populations have been documented in the East, so cougars may roam over wide areas looking for mates.

HABITS: Solitary except for females with young, born anytime of year. Young stay with mother up to 2 years. Sons travel widely in search of new territories; daughters stay closer to home.



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Adult Male Florida Panther. Credit: David S. Maehr

Attacks on Humans

Cougars are usually shy and avoid humans. Approximately 19 people have been killed in North America by cougars since 1890 (the same number of people are killed by dogs every year). There are some simple ways to avoid problems if you encounter a wild cougar:

- **DON'T RUN AWAY.** Running triggers a chase.
- **STAND TALL.** Open your arms or a jacket to make yourself big. Speak loudly but calmly. Maintain eye contact with the cat. Keep children close to you.
- **FIGHT BACK.** If attacked, use sticks, stones, or fists. Cougars can be driven away by resistance.

For more information on these and other issues concerning cougars in the East, see the Eastern Cougar Foundation website at www.easterncougar.org

HUNTERS' CORNER

Easily treed by dogs, cougars are legally hunted in most western states. Cougars need large tracts of undeveloped land. Habitat in the East is fragmented, so it's impossible to predict if there ever will be enough cougars to support trophy hunting. However, houndsmen might provide social service by chasing & treeing cougars, especially in areas where problem cougars develop. This could serve as "aversive conditioning" to keep cougars afraid of humans and away from habitations. Cougars do not compete with deer hunters for trophy bucks; see **PREDATION** above.



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FARMERS' CORNER

Livestock kills by dogs or coyotes are often attributed to cougars. Cougar sign includes a bite to the back of the neck or throat, large canine tooth punctures, claw marks along the shoulders, & often drag marks leading to a covered carcass. Cougars begin feeding on the liver, lungs & heart (which have essential nutrients). Dogs usually bite the hindquarters; coyotes inflict many bites around the throat, flank & back. Black bears may also bite & claw the head, but their claws are dull & don't pierce cleanly like a cougar's. Bringing livestock in during calving/lambing greatly reduces losses. If only a few livestock are kept, they can be protected by putting them in covered enclosures at night.