

# Life of the Mountain Lion

## Appearance

Mountain lions are graceful and majestic animals known for their strength and agility. The image to the right shows the color and physical attributes of adults and kittens, and the chart below compares the size differences between adult males and females. Their scientific name, *Puma concolor*, means cat of 1 color, yet adult mountain lions are usually tawny or tan, or slightly reddish in color with black-tipped ears and tail. Their coat patterning varies with age.

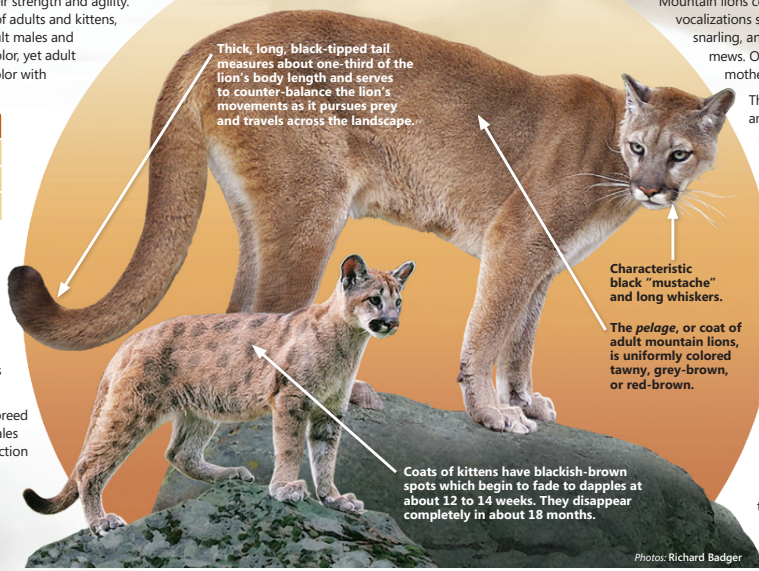
	Adult Males	Adult Females
Shoulder Height	30 in. (76 cm)	24 in. (61 cm)
Length*	7-8 ft. (2.1-2.4 m)	5.5-6 ft. (1.6-1.8 m)
Weight	120-160+ lbs. (54-72+ kg)	85-115 lbs. (38-52 kg)

\*Length is measured from nose to tip of tail.

## Reproduction

Mountain lions will mate with many other lions during a breeding season. Breeding pairs may spend an average of 2 to 3 days together. Mountain lions are unusual among carnivores because they give birth at any time of year. While adult males play no role in the rearing of kittens, they may feed on a carcass with the female and his offspring.

Females can have their first litter at 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 3 years of age, and breed every 2 years thereafter. The gestation period is 3 months. Females move their nursing kittens frequently to new den sites for protection and to improve access to prey. The social bond is critical to the kittens' well-being. If the mother dies before the kittens reach 6 months of age, they have little to no chance of surviving.



## Communication

Mountain lions communicate through visual, scent, and posturing signals, and through vocalizations such as low guttural growls, chirping, whistling, spitting, yowling, snarling, and hissing. Nursing kittens emit high-pitched, birdlike chirps and meows. Older kittens may also chirp to communicate with siblings or their mother. Mountain lions purr when together, but they cannot roar.

The most spectacular sound a mountain lion can make is a caterwaul, an eerie sound resembling a human cry or scream. Females caterwaul during mating season, especially when males are competing for the same receptive female.

## Distribution & Range

Mountain lions have the largest geographic range of any native land mammal in the Western Hemisphere. They occur from British Columbia in Canada, the Western United States, and throughout Central and South America to the southern tip of Chile.

California has more lion habitat than any other state, and more than half of the state is prime mountain lion habitat. They can be found wherever deer are present including forests, wetlands, riparian areas, and deserts. They can also be found in terrain ranging from grassy valleys and rolling oak woodlands to rugged mountains.

A male mountain lions' territory averages 100 to 200 square miles and typically encompasses all or part of the home ranges of multiple females. In California, female mountain lion ranges are usually 30 to 70 square miles in size. Depending on the location, there are typically fewer than 2 mountain lions per 100 square miles of suitable habitat.

## The First Year



92-day Gestation to Birth  
1 to 4 kittens are born, fully furred, spotted, and weighing just over a pound at birth.



2 weeks old  
Eyes and ears open. Mother leaves for short periods of time to hunt.



6 to 8 weeks old  
As kittens grow, they accompany their mother on hunts.



6 to 12 months  
Juvéniles become more independent. Spots continue to fade. They disperse at about 16 months to establish their own territories.



Simply seeing a mountain lion does not mean the mountain lion is a threat. Mountain lion attacks on humans are extremely rare. Mountain lions are very good at avoiding people, and generally behave indifferently toward us.

## Mountain Lion Safety Tips Take these recommended precautions while living or recreating in mountain lion country:

### Home, Pet, and Livestock Safety

#### Home Safety

- Don't feed deer, other wildlife, or feral cats which can attract mountain lions.
- Landscape around your home for safety.
  - Prune shrubs and trees around the base to keep mountain lions from using them as hiding spots.
  - Do not landscape with plants that are desirable to deer. Deer can attract mountain lions to your yard.
  - Install lighting to illuminate walkways at night. Lighting alone will not deter a lion, but it will allow you to see your surroundings.
  - Install tall deer-proof fencing to prevent deer from entering your property.
- Seal off open spaces under buildings and porches to keep mountain lions and other wildlife from using as shelter.
- Do not make food, water, or shelter available near your home.
  - Mountain lions use vegetated areas to move through populated areas into more remote habitat. If food, water, and shelter are not available mountain lions generally move on quickly.
- Keep garbage cans tightly sealed and compost secured.
- Supervise small children outdoors especially during the hours around dawn and dusk when mountain lions are most active.

#### Pet Safety

- Keep dogs and cats indoors, especially after dusk and before dawn, to prevent them from becoming prey for mountain lions and other wild animals.
- Keep pet food indoors. If you feed animals outside, gather up the food and water bowls and clean up spilled food so as not to attract wild animals.
- If you must keep pets outside, consider installing a fully secure, roofed kennel.

#### Livestock Safety

- When living in mountain lion habitat, confine livestock and other domestic animals in completely secured and covered enclosures or barns, particularly at night. These also include goats, llamas, sheep, chickens, and other fowl.
  - If you have a large herd in a relatively remote area, consider using specially trained livestock guard animals.
  - Install an electric fence around areas where livestock or domestic animals are kept.
- Encourage your neighbors to follow these simple precautions. Prevention is far better than a possible mountain lion confrontation.

### Safety When Recreating

#### Hiking & Camping

- Hike in pairs or groups.
- Keep small children close, preferably within a few feet alongside you.
- Keep bear spray accessible and review directions on its use.
- Make enough noise to avoid surprising wildlife, especially at bends in the trail. Whistles work well.
- Do not approach dead animals, especially deer or elk; they could be mountain lion prey left for a later meal.
- Keep your camp clean and store food and garbage in double plastic bags away from sleeping areas.

#### Mountain Biking

- Ride with a partner or in a small group, and consider wearing a helmet.
  - Use a bell or make noise as you go along the trail.
- #### Running
- Avoid running alone in mountain lion country, but especially not at dawn, dusk, or after dark.
  - Avoid running with headphones or ear buds that can block out sounds around you.
  - Make noise as you go along trails.

### If You Encounter a Mountain Lion

- Do not run. Running or rapid movements may trigger an attack.
- Stay together in one group.
- Never approach the mountain lion or offer it food.
- Pick up small children and place them on your shoulders.
- Face the mountain lion. Talk to it firmly and hold your ground while slowly backing away.
- Try to appear larger than the mountain lion. Get above it (e.g., step up onto a rock or stump). If wearing a jacket, hold it open to increase your apparent size. If you are in a group, stand shoulder-to-shoulder to appear intimidating.
- Always leave the animal an escape route, even if it means stepping aside so the mountain lion can move past you. Do not expect the mountain lion to turn and walk away.
- If the mountain lion does not leave, be more assertive. If it crouches and lays back its ears, bares its teeth, hissing, tail twitching, and hind feet pumping in preparation to jump, then it is time to shout, wave your arms and throw anything you have available directly at the lion (water bottle, book, backpack) at the animal.
- If the mountain lion attacks, fight back. Be aggressive and stay on your feet. Spraying bear spray (EPA approved) in the mountain lion's face is also effective. Attack victims have fought back successfully with rocks, sticks, garden tools, even an ink pen, or bare hands. Try to stay on your feet. If knocked down, try to protect head and neck.
- Always give a mountain lion or mountain lion kittens plenty of room and leave the area as soon as possible. Mountain lion kittens can look similar to domestic cats.

When in mountain lion country, carry bear spray, keep it accessible, and know how to use it.

Be a good steward at home and in the wild. By taking steps to safely coexist with these remarkable animals you can help to ensure they remain an important part of California's natural landscape.

