

# Mountain Lion Safety

Generally, Arizona mountain lions are calm, quiet, and elusive. They tend to live in remote, primitive country. The big cats are most commonly found in areas with plentiful deer and adequate cover. Such conditions exist in mountain subdivisions, urban fringes, and open spaces. Consequently, the number of mountain lion/human interactions has increased. This increase is due to more people moving into mountain lion habitat, fluctuations in deer populations, more people using hiking and running trails in lion habitat, and a greater awareness of the presence of mountain lions.

We can live with these incredibly efficient predators if we respect mountain lions and their habitat. To reduce the risk of problems with mountain lions on or near your property, we urge you to follow the following simple precautions.



## Identifying a Mountain Lion

Mountain lions are solid-colored—from pale brown to tawny brown. However, they do have white on their chins and the forward portion of their upper lips. They also have white fur on the lower chest and belly. In addition, they have black or dark brown markings on sides of their muzzles, the backs of their ears, and on tips of their tails.

The average adult male weighs approximately 110-180 pounds, the female 80-130 pounds. From nose to tip of the tail, the average male measures 6-8 feet and the average female measures 5-7 feet. Mountain lions' heads are small and their tails long in proportion to their bodies.

## Living in Mountain Lion Country

- Make lots of noise if you come and go during the times mountain lions are most active—dusk to dawn.
- Closely supervise children whenever they play outdoors. Make sure children are inside before dusk and not outside before dawn. Talk with children about lions and teach them what to do if they meet one.
- Don't feed wildlife! Feeding deer, javelina or other wildlife in your yard may attract mountain lions, which prey on these animals. Avoid landscaping with plants that attract deer and rabbits, especially non-native shrubs and plants.
- Landscape for safety. Remove dense and/or low-lying vegetation that provides hiding places for mountain lions, bobcats, and coyotes—especially around children's play areas. Make it difficult for wild predators to move about or approach your yard unseen.
- Install outdoor lighting. Light areas where you walk so you could see a lion if one were present.
- Keep your pet under control. Roaming pets are easy prey and can attract lions. Bring pets in at night. If you leave your pet outside, keep it in a kennel with a secure top. Don't feed pets outside; this can attract raccoons and other animals that are eaten by lions. Securely store all garbage.
- Place livestock in enclosed sheds or barns at night. Close doors to outbuildings to prevent inquisitive lions from entering.
- Encourage your neighbors to follow these simple precautions. Prevention is far better than a possible lion encounter.

## What You Should Do If You Encounter a Mountain Lion?

People rarely get more than a brief glimpse of a mountain lion in the wild. Lion attacks on people are rare, with fewer than a dozen fatalities in North America in more than 100 years. Most of the attacks were by young lions, hunting on their own for the first time and not yet living in established home ranges. Young lions may focus on easy prey, such as pets and small children.

There has been little research on how to avoid mountain lion attacks. But mountain lion attacks that have occurred are being analyzed and patterns of behavior and response are beginning to emerge. The following suggestions may be helpful, however, remember that every situation is different with respect to the mountain lion, the terrain, the people, and their activity.

- Do not hike alone. Go in groups, with adults supervising children.
- Keep children close to you. Observations of captured mountain lions reveal that the animals seem especially drawn to children. Keep children within your sight at all times.
- Stay calm if you encounter a mountain lion. Stop or back away slowly, if you can do so safely.
- Do not approach a lion. Most mountain lions will try to avoid a confrontation. Give the lion a way to escape.
- Do not run from a lion. Running may encourage a mountain lion to chase. Instead, stand and face the animal. Make eye contact.
- If you have small children with you, pick them up so they do not panic and run. Try to avoid turning away from the lion while picking up a child.
- Do not crouch down or bend over, as you will look more like a four-legged prey animal.
- Do all you can to appear larger. Raise your arms. Open your jacket if you are wearing one. If you have small children with you, protect them by picking them up so they won't panic and run.
- If the lion is aggressive, throw stones, branches or whatever you can get your hands on without crouching down or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice. The idea is to convince the mountain lion that you are not prey and that you may be a danger to it.
- Fight back if attacked! Lions have been driven off by prey that fights back. People have successfully fought back with rocks, sticks, caps or jackets, garden tools, and their bare hands. Remain standing or try to get back up.



Left Front

Right Front



### Recognizing Tracks

Both canids (wolves, dogs, & coyotes) and felids (lions, bobcats, & house cats) make a track with a heel pad and four toes. How can you tell whether you are looking at the track of a mountain lion or a wolf or large dog? The heel pads are shaped differently and the toes are placed differently.

The leading edge of the heel pad in a felid track has two lobes; canids have only one. The hind edge of the felid heel pad has three lobes; canids have only two. The leading edge of the inside middle toe of felids is further forward than the other middle toe; the two middle toes of canids are very close to side-by-side.

Felid tracks do not usually show claw marks except in some cases when the cat is running or pouncing. Canid tracks always have claw marks.



Left Rear

Right Rear

