

WHEN MOUNTAIN LIONS MEET PEOPLE

WHAT TO DO IF YOU LIVE IN LION COUNTRY

Mountain lion sightings are rare, but for those living in lion country there are key points to remember that will help humans coexist with these magnificent predators.

We must respect mountain lions and their habitat. To reduce the risk of problems with mountain lions on or near your property, take a few simple precautions:

- > DO NOT INTENTIONALLY FEED WILDLIFE.
- > When outdoors make lots of noise during the times mountain lions are most active – dusk to dawn.
- > Install outside lighting. Light areas where you walk so you can see a mountain lion if it is present.
- > Closely supervise children whenever they play outdoors. Make sure children are inside before dusk and not outside until after dawn. Talk with children about mountain lions and teach them what to do if they encounter one.
- > Landscape or remove vegetation to eliminate hiding places for mountain lions, especially around children's play areas. Make it difficult for lions to approach unseen.
- > Plant only shrubs that deer will not browse to discourage concentrations of deer. Predators follow prey.
- > Keep pets under control. Roaming pets are easy prey and can attract mountain lions. Bring pets in at night. If you leave your pet outside, keep it in a kennel with a secure top. Do not feed pets outside. This can attract raccoons and other animals that are eaten by lions. Store all garbage securely.
- > Place livestock in enclosed sheds or barns at night. Close doors to all outbuildings since inquisitive mountain lions may go inside for a look.
- > Mountain lions cover their kill. If you find what looks like a lion kill, stay clear. The lion may be guarding it.

Encourage your neighbors to follow these precautions. These measures will help prevent a possible mountain lion confrontation.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU MEET A MOUNTAIN LION

Mountain lion attacks in the United States are rare. According to statistics kept since 1890, mountain lions in the U.S. and Canada have killed fewer than two dozen people. Most of the lion attacks were by young lions, perhaps forced to hunt on their own and not yet living in established areas. There has never been a recorded attack in South Dakota.

Here are some steps to follow to avoid an attack should you encounter a lion:

- > STAY CALM when you come upon a lion. Talk calmly yet firmly to it, while moving slowly away.
- > STOP AND DON'T RUN. Back away slowly only if you can do so safely. Running may stimulate a mountain lion's instinct to chase and attack. Face the lion and stand upright.
- > DO ALL YOU CAN TO APPEAR LARGE. 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 will not panic and run.
- > MAKE PLENTY OF NOISE to reduce your chances of surprising a mountain lion. A sturdy walking stick can be used to ward off a lion. Make sure children are close to you and within your sight at all times. Talk with children about lions and teach them what to do if they encounter one. Do not approach a mountain lion, especially one that is feeding or with kittens. Most lions will try to avoid confrontation. Give them an escape route.
- > CONVINC THE LION YOU ARE NOT PREY. If the lion behaves aggressively, throw stones, branches or whatever you can get your hand on without crouching down or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly.
- > FIGHT BACK if a lion attacks you. Lions have been driven away by prey that fights back. People have fought with rocks, sticks, caps or jackets, garden tools and their bare hands successfully. Remain standing and try to get someone to help.

WHO DO YOU CALL?

In South Dakota, the Game, Fish and Parks Division of Wildlife is responsible for managing, conserving and protecting wildlife. Your concerns about wildlife are our concerns.

To report a mountain lion sighting, an encounter or attack, please contact the Division of Wildlife at one of the offices listed below. For after-hours emergencies contact your local sheriff's office or State Radio Communications at 605/393-8121 (Rapid City), 605/773-3536 (Pierre), 605/353-7132 (Huron). Your timely information is valuable.

We are interested in recording all the information we can about mountain lions in South Dakota. If you see a lion or have an encounter please call one of these offices:

GF&P Rapid City Office
4130 Adventure Trail
Rapid City, SD 57702
605/394-2391

GF&P Watertown Office
400 W Kemp Avenue
Watertown, SD 57201
605/882-5200

GF&P Mobridge Office
909 Lake Front Drive
Mobridge, SD 57601
605/845-7814

GF&P Chamberlain Office
1550 E King
Chamberlain, SD 57325
605/734-4530

GF&P Sioux Falls Office
4500 S Oxbow Avenue
Sioux Falls, SD 57104
605/362-2700

GF&P Information Office
20641 SD Hwy 1806
Ft. Pierre, SD 57532
605/223-7660

For more information about mountain lions,
visit the GFP website at: gfp.sd.gov



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LIVING with Mountain Lions



Mountain lions are native to South Dakota. Primarily they are found in the Black Hills, but may occasionally travel through other parts of the state. These predatory cats have played both a historical – the Custer expedition of 1874 reported seeing a mountain lion near the headwaters of Castle Creek and found signs of their presence on several occasions – and a modern role to the balance of nature in this state.

Encounters with mountain lions are extremely rare. But, as with any wild animal, mountain lions can be dangerous. This pamphlet contains information on mountain lion sign, and what to do if you encounter a mountain lion.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT LIONS

Mountain lions are at home in the Black Hills and are known to travel through areas outside the Black Hills when pushed from their home territory, but there is no evidence of established prairie populations.

Mountain lions are powerful predators that primarily prey on deer. However, they have been known to feed on a number of different prey animals. In South Dakota their natural enemies include other lions, disease, vehicles and people.

South Dakota State University and the S.D. Department of Game, Fish and Parks are studying a wide range of topics related to mountain lions in the Black Hills including home range size, survival, dispersal, population size, prey selection, survey methods, hunting impacts, genetics and disease. Results of these studies will guide future management objectives for mountain lions in this state.



PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The mountain lion’s scientific name is *Puma concolor*, which means “cat of one color.”

Mountain lions are tan to light cinnamon with black on the back of their ears and the tip of their tail. Adult males may grow to an excess of 8 feet in length, including the tail, and weigh an average of 150 pounds. Adult females may be up to 7 feet long and weigh an average of 90 pounds.

Kittens are spotted with dark rings around their tails. As they mature the spots fade. At six months they weigh more than 30 pounds, about the size of an adult bobcat.

Females begin having kittens when they are about 2-1/2 years old and will have a litter approximately every two years. The pregnancy lasts about three months. The mother will choose a secluded spot – under an uprooted tree or in a rocky depression – to give birth to a litter of two to four kittens. She raises the kittens and protects them from their main predator, male mountain lions.

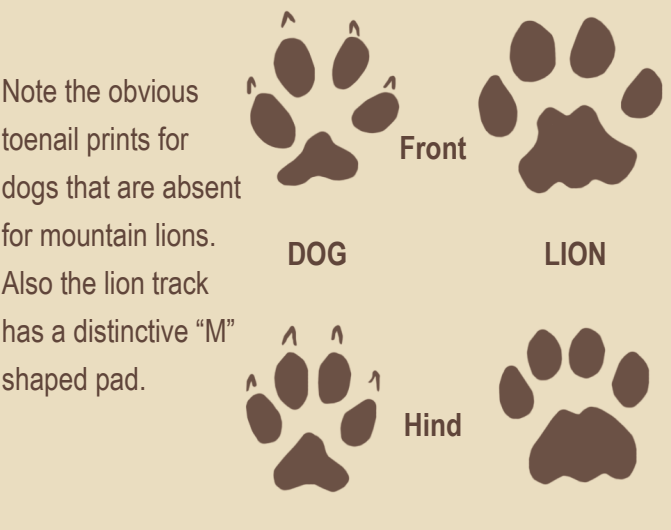
When the kittens are six weeks old the mother begins taking them to her kills to feed. They are weaned at two to three months and at six months are becoming capable hunters. Kittens remain with their mother for up to a year-and-a-half while their hunting skills improve.

TRACKS AND SIGN

Mountain lions often place their hind paw in the imprint made by the front paw when walking. Since their claws are retractable, claw marks are rarely present. They have four toes and three distinct lobes at the base of the heel pad.

Mountain lions are solitary animals. If tracks indicate two or more lions traveling together, they are most likely from a female with young or siblings traveling together.

Mountain lions mark their home territory with piles of dirt and twigs, called scrapes, which signal to other lions that this area is occupied.



HUNTING AND FEEDING HABITS

Mountain lions are primarily nocturnal, although they will travel and hunt during the day. They are most active at dusk and dawn.

Deer provide the main source of food for lions, but they are opportunistic and will eat a number of things including elk, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, porcupines, small mammals, livestock and pets.

They are ambush hunters, using available cover to stalk prey, then rushing and attacking from behind. They have a powerful bite that they typically apply just below the base of the skull in the neck area. The carcass is drug to a sheltered spot beneath a tree or overhang where the lion can feed. After feeding the lion covers the carcass with dirt, twigs, leaves or snow and typically return to feed on it over the course of a few days. Mountain lions often move and re-cover their kills after each feeding. A mountain lion is protective of its kill and may be dangerous to people when feeding.

