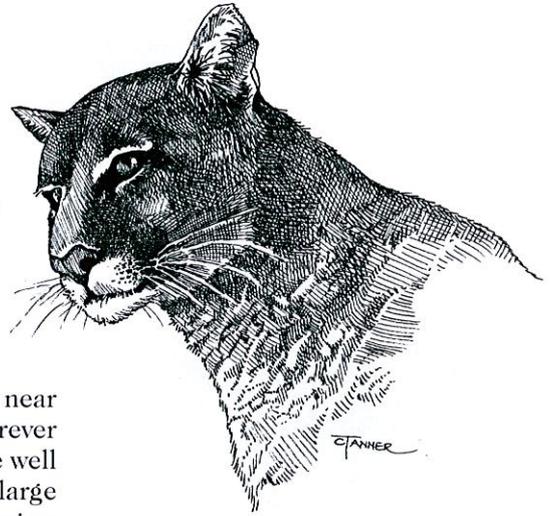


M Mountain Lion

BY TERRY B. JOHNSON, NONGAME BRANCH CHIEF
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SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Felis concolor*. Genus from Latin *felis* meaning a cat. Derivation of specific epithet unclear; translates from Latin as "dwell with," perhaps an indication of its ubiquity in historical times.

DESCRIPTION: Adults 70 to 190 pounds in weight and 5.5 to 7.5 feet in length (including 1.5- to 3-foot tail). Height at shoulders 26 to 31 inches. Females smaller than males, in length and weight. Adults typically uniformly tawny to grayish overall. Dark brown to blackish along sides of nose and backs of ears. Tail tipped dark brown to black. Melanotic individuals uncommon. Kittens spotted. Eyeshine greenish gold.

DISTRIBUTION: From Southern Canada to southern South America (Patagonia). Largely eliminated from eastern U.S. Essentially statewide in Arizona, though much less common in southwestern corner. In Arizona, found from ca. 75 feet above sea level (near Yuma) to above 9,000 feet (in many areas).

HABITAT: Most commonly inhabits rocky foothills, canyons, and mountains. Known from low-elevation desertscrub to high-elevation conifer forests.

BIOLOGY: Once among the most widely distributed terrestrial mammals, the mountain lion is known by many common names, including panther, puma, and cougar. Although typically a secretive and elusive animal, by any name it is well

known in terms of biology.

Mountains lions are at or near the top of the food web wherever they occur. Their 30 teeth are well suited to tearing flesh. The large canines are especially impressive. Their prey are mainly deer and other medium to small mammals, but also include elk, desert tortoises, and a variety of other wildlife, livestock, and domestic animals. Kills are often cached (covered with scraped-up vegetation and leaf litter), with the lion returning again and again to feed. In turn, they are killed by humans (mainly) and other mountain lions, but also sometimes by wolves, bears, or even their prey (antlers and hooves can inflict mortal wounds; so can porcupine quills).

The cougar's home range can be huge. Ten or so animals may occupy 100 square miles, but individuals may overlap considerably. Wanderers may turn up almost anywhere. Dispersing individuals may move 100 miles or more from their natal grounds. Feeding areas may include 25 or more square miles.

Chiefly nocturnal, but cougars may be active at any time. They do not hibernate. They often den in caves or overhung cliffs, but may use any well-concealed spot, such as a fallen log or exposed root ball.

At 2 or 3 years of age, mountain lions are capable of breeding. They mate only briefly, not for life. After ca. 90 days of gestation, the female bears two to six kittens (usually two). Most young are born in spring to midsummer. The young stay with the female for a year,

sometimes two, as they learn to hunt. Females breed every two or three years.

STATUS: As a species the mountain lion is not endangered. In Arizona, the statewide population may exceed 3,000. Thus, it is not included on the Department's draft list of *Wildlife of Special Concern in Arizona* (AGFD in prep.), and is not listed or proposed for listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered or threatened. One putative subspecies, the Yuma puma (*Felis concolor browni*) has been considered a candidate for federal listing, but its taxonomic validity is questionable at best.

MANAGEMENT NEEDS: Its needs are few: sufficient habitat to support healthy prey populations, and sufficient wild country to afford minimal contact with humans and their livestock and domestic animals. Movement corridors between backcountry habitats are essential to gene flow, but many are increasingly becoming difficult gauntlets for transient lions to survive. Education is needed to help humans recognize the invaluable ecological role played by mountain lions. Enhanced awareness of how humans should behave in lion country is also needed. 🐾