

FOCUS

Wild Arizona

Key Words

Adaptation: physical or behavioral characteristic that helps an animal survive

Predator: an animal that hunts and eats other animals

Prey: an animal that is hunted and eaten for food

Mountain lions, also known as cougars or pumas, are powerful **predators**. They usually hunt deer for food. However, they have been known to eat elk, javelina and small animals such as rabbits.

In order to catch their **prey**, mountain lions need special skills or **adaptations**. One of these adaptations is their remarkable jumping ability. In fact, mountain lions can jump up in the air about 15 feet and cross a distance of 45 feet ... in one leap!

Just for fun:

Let's compare your jumping ability with that of a lion.

You will need a ruler or measuring tape and the help of a parent or friend. Find an open, clear space — a grassy lawn works well. Use a stick or rock to mark a starting point. From this point, jump forward as far as you can. Have your helper mark your landing spot. Use the ruler to measure your jumping distance.

How far did you jump? _____

This time, jump straight up in the air. Have your helper mark how high your feet got off the ground. Use the ruler to measure from the ground to this mark.

How high did you jump? _____

Do the math:

How much farther can a mountain lion jump compared to you? _____

How many times would you need to jump to travel as far as a lion can in one jump? _____

In the 1991 World Championships, American Mike Powell jumped about 29 feet, farther than any other human. How much farther than Mike can a lion jump? _____

How much higher can a mountain lion jump than you can? _____

In the 1993 World Championships, Cuban Javier Sotomayor jumped about 8 feet in the air, higher than any other human. How much higher than Javier can a lion jump? _____

In your opinion, why is jumping so important to a mountain lion? _____

Because mountain lions are such large and skilled hunters, people often are afraid of them. During the past 100 years, however, there have been fewer than two dozen human

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deaths (in Arizona) because of mountain lions. They usually try to avoid humans. Even though they are common throughout most parts of Arizona, people rarely see them.

Still, it is necessary to be safe if you live near lions. In their search to find food, water or shelter, mountain lions sometimes may come near homes. Here are some suggestions to keep lions away from your home:

- **Do not feed wildlife.** By providing food for deer, rabbits and other animals, you may also attract mountain lions, which eat those animals.
- **Keep your pets inside or on a leash as much as possible.**
- **Help your parents remove thick plants around your home that may provide a hiding place for mountain lions.**

Take a walk around your house or school grounds. Pretend you are a mountain lion. Can you find anything that may provide the food, water or shelter you need? If so, what can you do to make the area safer?

If food, water and shelter are not available, then mountain lions usually will avoid an area. Do your best to make yourself, your family, your school and your pets safe. 🦁



▪ This feature is part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Focus Wild Arizona program, a free educational program for teachers, parents, students or anyone interested in learning about wildlife and habitat. Visit our Web site, www.azgfd.gov/focuswild, to find exciting lessons and resources.