

UC SANTA CRUZ CAMPUS NATURAL RESERVE

MOUNTAIN LION



Zane Hiatt

Scientific Name: *Puma concolor*

Common Name: Puma, Cougar, Mountain Lion, Panther, and more

Global Rarity: Secure

State Rarity: Candidate status for listing as Threatened under State Endangered Species Act for six populations ranging from San Francisco to San Diego

UCSC Rarity: Uncommon



General Description

Mountain Lions are a large cat native to the Americas. Their fur is a tan-brown color with white on the belly. Their size varies in relation to the latitude in which they occur, with lions closer to the equator smaller than those closer to the poles. Mountain Lions are roamers and follow the migration patterns of their primary prey, mule deer. Populations in six areas within central and southern California, including those in the Santa Cruz Mountains, are a candidate to join the state Threatened species listing. The statewide population is unknown but may be between 4,000-6,000 individuals.



Identification

General Color: Tan-brown fur with a black tipped tail, a black mustache, and a white underside

Length: 30 inches tall and 7-8 feet long, which includes their long tail

Weight: Males weigh 115-220 pounds, females weigh 64-141 pounds, and cubs weigh 400-500 grams at birth

Juvenile: spots until 18 months old

Geographic Range and Seasonal Movements

Mountain Lions range from western Canada and the United States (plus Florida), through all of Mexico, and Central and South America. In California, they range through all areas with the exception of the Central Valley and some desert areas. In the Sierra Nevada mountains and other strongly seasonal areas, some follow seasonal migration patterns of their primary prey, the mule deer.



UCSC Distribution

Several mountain lions occasionally move through the UCSC campus as part of regular movements through larger territories. These animals range from south campus through Upper Campus.

Life history

Habitat: Mountain lions can be found in steep rocky canyons, mountainous terrain, deserts, and coastal forests. Their home ranges can be up to 100 square miles.

Reproduction: Females can breed year-round, giving birth every 2 years. They can have 1-6 cubs. The young stay with their mother for 15-26 months before leaving and can live for 10 years in the wild. They are polygamous meaning both males and females will often mate with multiple partners.

Behavior: Mountain lions are shy and solitary creatures. They are very elusive and hard to find when they do not want to be seen. They hunt during dawn, dusk, and at night by sneaking up on their prey and pouncing from behind.

Diet: Deer are their primary prey but they will eat smaller animals.

Research Highlights and Fun Facts

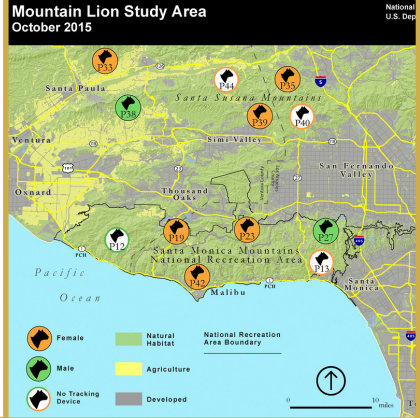
- Mountain lions can hiss, but do not roar like other big cats.
- They stalk their prey before pouncing with a horizontal leap of up to ~40 feet, sinking their teeth in their prey's neck as they land.
- They communicate their territorial boundaries and mating availability through scent marks and scrapes.
- UCSC's Puma Project has tracking collars on many of the mountain lions in the area. They have tracked over 70 lions over 6,600 square miles since 2009 and have published a variety of studies on based on their movement data.



Conservation Status

Candidate for California State Threatened listing (as of May 2021)

This candidate listing applies to six areas between San Francisco and San Diego, including the Santa Cruz Mountains where UCSC is located. Data from the Santa Cruz Puma Project has informed this listing.



Threats

Statewide:

Mountain Lions are threatened in certain areas of the state by:

1. Habitat fragmentation
2. Low gene flow between isolated populations
3. Mortality from being struck by cars
4. Depredation from ranchers and other landowners



UCSC campus:

At UCSC, the Mountain Lion is threatened by:

1. Habitat fragmentation due to development



Ways you can help

1. Support efforts to maintain habitat connectivity in your communities.
2. Support efforts to build wildlife over- or underpasses to allow safe passage past roads that bisect occupied habitat areas and reconnect subpopulations, thereby reducing inbreeding by allowing gene flow.
3. Do not leave pet food outside and keep your pets indoors to minimize potential human-wildlife conflicts.

References

California Department of Fish and Wildlife. n.d. Commonly asked questions about mountain lions. Retrieved from <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Mammals/Mountain-Lion/FAQ#359951241-how-many-mountain-lions-are-in-california> on 14 May 2021.

National Wildlife Federation. n.d. Mountain Lion. Retrieved from www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Mammals/Mountain-Lion on 14 May 2021.

Pierce, B.M., V.C. Bleich, J.D. Wehausen, and R.T. Bowyer. 1999. Migratory Patterns of Mountain Lions: Implications for Social Regulation and Conservation. *Journal of Mammalogy* 80:986-992.

Santa Cruz Puma Project. 2018. Santa Cruz Puma Project. Retrieved from www.santacruzpumas.org/ on 14 May 2021.

Western Wildlife. 2020. Cougar Identification. Western Wildlife Outreach. Retrieved from westernwildlife.org/cougar-outreach-project/cougar-identification/ on 14 May 2021.

Cover, top photo: "Cougar ready to pounce" by Harlequeen is licensed with CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

Cover, top small photo: "Mountain Lion" by USFWS Mountain Prairie is licensed with CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

Cover, bottom small photo: "8th Place - Mountain Lion" by USFWS Mountain Prairie is licensed with CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

Cover, right photo: "Mountain Lion" by CaliforniaDFW is licensed with CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

Page 1, top photo: "Mountain Lion" by Lil Rose is licensed with CC BY-ND 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/>

Page 1, middle photo: "mountain lion (Felis concolor) kitten" by CaliforniaDFW is licensed with CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

Page 2, top photo by Alex Jones, used by permission.

Page 2, middle photo: "Mountain Lion 006" by contemplicity is licensed with CC BY 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>

Page 2, bottom photo: by Alex Jones, used by permission.

Page 3, top photo: "Mountain Lion Study Area" by Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is marked under CC PDM 1.0. To view the terms, visit <https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/>

Page 3, bottom right photo: Alex Jones, used by permission.

Page 3, bottom left photo: "Verdugos Mountain Lion" by Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area is licensed with CC BY 2.0.