

Mountain Lion Facts

The mountain lion (*Puma concolor*) is known by many names, including cougar, puma, catamount and panther. Historically, mountain lions lived throughout much of the eastern United States, including Indiana. One source – Mammals of Indiana (2009) by John O. Whitaker Jr. and Russell E. Mumford – states that the last recorded wild mountain lion in Indiana was from DeKalb County in 1864.

The mountain lion is a very large, slender cat with a small head. The ears are rounded, small, and are not tufted, and the back of the ears are all black to dark gray. The adult coat is a uniform tan or tawny color with a white or cream colored chin, undersides, and inside the legs. The long tail is up to half the total body length, thick, with the last several inches tipped black. The total length of a mountain lion is 5 - 8 ½ feet with a weight on average from 75 – 160 pounds. Adults average about 30 inches high at the shoulder.

Mountain lions do not have a melanistic (black) version. Any large black cat, similar in size to a mountain lion, would either have to be jaguar or leopard, both of which are not indigenous to the United States. Such individuals would have had to escape from captivity. The Division of Fish and Wildlife is not aware of any jaguars or leopards that have escaped from permitted individuals.

The Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife has never stocked or released mountain lions in Indiana, nor does it plan to.

What We Know

Data collected by the Cougar Network and other states over the past decade, suggest that mountain lions are beginning to appear in states outside their traditional western range, including Midwestern and Southeastern states. It is suspected that this expansion is the result of an increasing mountain lion population due to increased legal protection and greater availability of primary prey species such as deer.

The chance of encountering a mountain lion today in Indiana is almost non-existent. There is no confirmed evidence of mountain lions attacking livestock, pets, or people in Indiana. There is no confirmed evidence of a reproducing population in Indiana. There are individuals that have obtained permits to legally maintain captive mountain lions, and there are likely individuals that have captive animals illegally. Other states also have captive mountain lions. There are instances of these animals escaping or being intentionally released by their owner. A previously captive mountain lion could survive on the abundant deer in Indiana. Again, these would be extremely rare and isolated instances.

A mountain lion was confirmed in a rural part of Greene County northeast of Bloomfield when multiple images of an individual mountain lion were captured on camera by the Division of Fish and Wildlife on May 1, 2010. The origin of this animal is unknown and it is likely surviving on deer that it kills.

The legal status of the mountain lion in Indiana is that of an exotic mammal and, as a result, is protected. State law allows a resident landowner or tenant to kill a mountain lion while it is causing damage to property owned or leased by the landowner or tenant. If the landowner/tenant wishes to have someone else take the mountain lion, that person is required to secure a permit from the DNR Division of Fish & Wildlife. Any mountain lion killed should be reported to the DNR immediately.

So, You Have Seen a Mountain Lion

The Division of Fish and Wildlife has initiated a mountain lion reporting procedure to maintain information of possible mountain lion sightings. A report can be made with any DNR office or biologist. Only those reports accompanied with a clear, verifiable picture of a mountain lion (the location must be verifiable as well); a picture or plaster cast of the mountain lion tracks; or other specific mountain lion behavior will be field investigated. Reports not having such evidence will be entered into the database as unconfirmed reports.

The DNR annually receives reports of mountain lion sightings around the state, but typically the evidence has turned out to be something other than a mountain lion such as a housecat, dog, or coyote, has been inconclusive, or has proved to be part of an Internet hoax.

While the DNR recognizes that the prospect of mountain lions is cause for alarm to many citizens, the likelihood of such an encounter with a mountain lion in Indiana is very remote. Remember that mountain lions are reclusive animals, even in the areas where there are breeding populations in western states, so there is little likelihood for this animal to be seen in large cities, neighborhoods, and areas where there are humans.

While the chance of encountering a mountain lion today in Indiana is almost non-existent, people should be alert to their surroundings. If an encounter does happen, advice from authorities in Western states, where mountain lions are more common, is:

- Do not approach a mountain lion. Give it a way to escape.
- Do not run from a mountain lion. Instead, stand and face the animal. Make eye contact.
- Do not crouch or bend over. Do all you can to appear larger. Raise your arms, open your jacket or shirt. Wave your arms slowly and speak firmly in a loud voice.
- Hold children and pets near you.
- Fight back if attacked using big sticks, stones, or any other available items.

More Mountain Lion Information

For additional information on mountain lions, visit the Cougar Network at www.easterncougarnet.org, or go to www.easterncougarnet.org/Assets/pumaidguide.pdf for an identification guide that describes how to distinguish mountain lion tracks from other animals.