

Outdoor Insights

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JEFFERSON COUNTY OPEN SPACE

Mountain Lions? Oh, My!

Questions posed to Mary Ann Bonnell, Jeffco Open Space Visitor Services Supervisor



Which is correct? Mountain Lion or Cougar?

Both are correct. Puma, panther, mountain cat and catamount are all synonyms for mountain lion. The name mountain lion can be misleading because mountain lions are not limited to the mountains. They can be found anywhere there is cover and their favorite food source, deer.

How common are mountain lion sightings?

They are rare because mountain lions are stealthy and want very much to avoid people and human activity. In fact, when they occasionally wander into a human environment, they will often tree themselves for safety reasons and hope they are not discovered through the day. Mountain Lions that find themselves in urban or suburban areas are just passing through, either in pursuit of prey or trying to disperse to new territories, they do not want to stay; not at all.

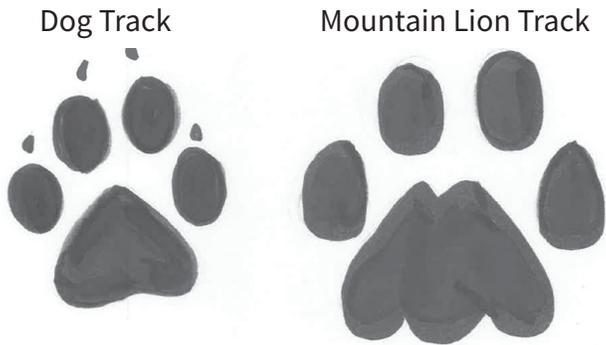
How do I recognize a mountain lion?

Lots of animals are mistaken for mountain lions, but one of the most common ones is the domestic cat. Mountain Lions are more than six feet long, uniform in color above and slightly lighter underneath. Their face is flat, and their body is muscular. Their tail is nearly three feet long and is generally held with the black tip up a bit higher than the rest of the length of the tail.

In a follow up to a reported mountain lion sighting in the eastern metro area, the witness provided the following details about what they saw. They described an animal as large, muscular and, “Whatever it was, it crossed a four lane street with median and bike lanes in two leaps!” That was key information as a mountain lion in full gallop can span 20 feet between footfalls.

How do I know if a mountain lion has been in the area?

Tracks, which are often confused with domestic dog tracks, are often the only clue that mountain lions leave behind. Track identification tips include looking for a more rounded track overall with no claw marks.



Dog print size is dependent on breed and this example is representative of a 50-70 pound dog. Mountain lion prints are generally 3-1/2” wide by 3-1/2” high.

Mountain lions will sometimes leave a carcass and partially bury it. If you find what you suspect is a mountain lion kill, it is not a good idea to loiter in the area as the lion may return and may defend the carcass.

What should I do if I see a mountain lion?

Anything that makes you look big, tough and not at all like prey is a good idea. Stop, face the lion, make yourself large by widening your stance and hold your hands over your head. Shout, “GO AWAY!” or “STAY BACK” like you really mean it. Fight back with all your might in the event of an attack. Mountain lion attack survivors have fought

lions off with mountain bikes, walking sticks, and even their bare hands.

How often are people attacked by mountain lions?

There have been 25 deaths attributed to mountain lions since 1890. The current reported attack rate for Canada and the United States is between 5 and 6 per year.

Report sightings and encounters to Jeffco Open Space Natural Resources at 303-271-5927. When leaving a message, include your phone number for staff to follow up if additional information is needed. Jeffco Open Space is cooperating with Colorado Parks and Wildlife on a mountain lion study and this information on sightings will be helpful.



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A topical newsletter, Outdoor Insights provides information on Jefferson County, Colorado's Open Space projects, programs and activities. For more information, contact Communications Manager Thea Rock, trock@jeffco.us or (303) 271-5902. Read past issues on jeffco.us/parks.