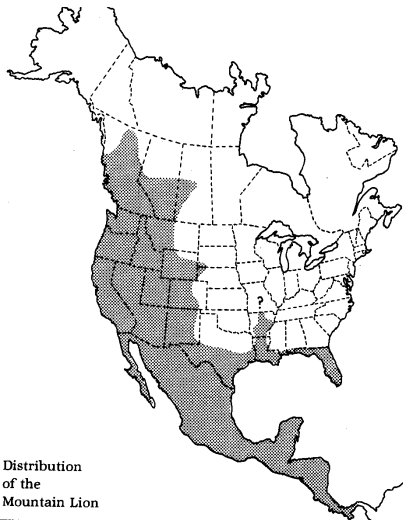




## HISTORY

Mountain lions are often times referred to as cougars, pumas, panthers, painters, and catamounts. They are the largest of three wildcats historically documented in Iowa. The lynx and the bobcat are the other two. The mountain lion probably occurred throughout the state, but nowhere in great numbers. The last historical record of a mountain lion in Iowa appears to be near Cincinnati, Iowa in Appanoose County where one was shot in 1867.



## DESCRIPTION

The mountain lion is a very large, slender cat with a small head, small rounded ears that are not tufted, very powerful shoulders and hindquarters, and a long, heavy, cylindrical tail. Adults are 6-9 feet in length including the tail which is 2½-3 feet in length. Males weigh 140-160 pounds and females weigh 90-110 pounds.

The mountain lion is grizzled gray to cinnamon tawny brown in color, and the last 2 inches of the tail are black.

## BIOLOGY

Mountain lions are usually 3 years old before reaching reproductive maturity and usually have young (kits) at 2 year intervals. Kits can be born any time throughout the year but the peak period

is summer. They will average 2-3 kits per litter and kits have brown spots on a buff color. Adults are very capable of swimming. Mountain lions can readily climb trees to escape dogs or obtain food. Female home ranges average 90 square miles while male home ranges average 300 square miles. Longevity is 12-20 years, but only a few live longer than 12 years. Mountain lions have an interesting social hierarchy. Dominant males have their harem of females and occasionally young males will challenge the dominant male for females. The younger males usually are forced out and leave the area, basically becoming nomads of the landscape, most likely searching for the presence of females. Mountain lions can move several hundred miles in a very short period of time. **ALTHOUGH RUMORS WILL CONTINUE, BE ASSURED, THE IOWA DNR HAS NOT RELEASED MOUNTAIN LIONS IN IOWA AND HAVE NO INTENTION OF DOING SO.**

## FOOD HABITS

Mountain lions favorite food items are small mammals and deer. Like all predators they are opportunists and will also take any small mammals or birds. They rarely take livestock. They are ambush predators, taking large prey by a bite on the back of the neck or throat. They sometimes will carry a prey item to cover and forage first on the liver, heart and lungs. If they cannot consume the entire kill all at once, they will cache it (cover and camouflage) and return later to feed again. Mountain lions prefer fresh meat and once the cached food items become tainted, the rest is left for scavengers such as coyotes, turkey vultures, and crows to feast upon.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH A MOUNTAIN LION

In the past 150 years, 19 U.S. human fatalities have occurred from mountain lion attacks. Fortunately, none have occurred in Iowa. Generally a mountain lion will sense human presence before humans know they are in the area and the mountain lions will quickly vacate the area. However, if one has an unexpected rare

encounter with a mountain lion (we anticipate this will rarely happen in Iowa, because there are so few animals in the state) the following is recommended:

- 1) **Savor the moment, as you will be one of the few lucky people to see a mountain lion in Iowa in well over a century.**
- 2) **DON'T RUN! Running will stimulate certain animals to chase you (like a dog that wants to bite you, especially if you run).**
- 3) **Stand tall, look big, puff up, lift your coat over your shoulders.**
- 3) **Take control of the situation. Scream loudly, throw objects.**
- 4) **Gather children in close and slowly back away keeping your eye of the animal.**
- 5) **If attacked, fight back vigorously with sharp objects and poke the eyes of the animal.**

Urban sprawl into mountain lion country in the west has caused more human encounters with mountain lions. People in the western states that have been attacked are usually unaware of mountain lion presence and are usually cross-country skiing, jogging, or biking. Again the animal is probably surprised by the presence of these folks and the fast movement away from the mountain lion stimulates the animal to chase the fast moving person and sometimes attack.

## THE FUTURE OF MOUNTAIN LIONS IN IOWA

The mountain lions will remain difficult to manage both from a biological and political standpoint. It is doubtful that the mountain lion will ever have much presence in Iowa. First of all there is some question about whether Iowa actual good mountain lion habitat. The tolerance or intolerance of humans will dictate whether they will ever be able to get a foot hold in the state. Some sort of legal status in the Iowa Code will be necessary. In the meantime, their possible presence in Iowa has generated considerable excitement both pro and con and only time will tell whether they once again will become designated wildlife in the state.

