

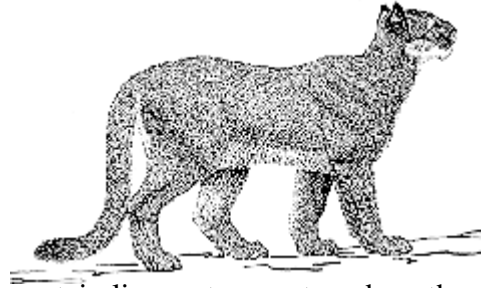
Eastern Cougar Fact Sheet

Eastern Cougar *Puma concolor cougar*

New York Status: **Extirpated**
Federal Status: **Extinct**

Description

The cougar is known by many common names, including puma, mountain lion, catamount, and panther. Next to the jaguar, it is the largest North American cat. Weights range from 80-225 pounds (36-103 kg), averaging 140 (64 kg). Length varies from 5-9 feet (150-275 cm); this measurement includes the 26-32 inch (66-82 cm) tail. Males are larger than females. Cougars have long, slender bodies and small, broad, round heads. Ears are short, erect and rounded. The short fur is usually tawny (brownish red-orange to light brown), more tan in the summer months and grayer during the winter. The muzzle, chin and underparts are a creamy white. Black coloring appears on the tip of the tail, behind the ears, and at the base of the whiskers on the sides of the muzzle. Immature cougars are paler, with obvious dark spots on their flanks.



Life History

Females mate every two to three years and produce a litter of two to three cubs. There is no set breeding season, however most births are in the spring. At six months of age, the cubs weigh 30-40 pounds. They leave the den at this time, accompanying the female to her kills and occasionally hunting with her individually. A young male may leave at one year of age, but most cubs remain until they are nearly two. The average life span for cougars is about eight years. Adult cougars have no natural enemies, only man with his hunting dogs.

Prey species include deer, elk, occasionally domestic livestock, and any smaller mammals which opportunity makes available. The preferred meat is deer. Cougars kill about a deer a week. Like wolves, cougars often kill old, weak or sick individuals, leaving the prey population in a healthier overall condition. Cougars are solitary, territorial hunters.

Distribution and Habitat

The original distribution of the cougar was across lower Canada in the north to Patagonia, South America in the south. It was the most widely distributed land mammal in the Western Hemisphere. It was found in a variety of habitats, including tidal marshes, deserts, mountainous terrain and deciduous, coniferous and tropical forests.

With the exception of Florida, the cougar has been considered extirpated from east of the Mississippi River since 1900. In the west, it is still quite common in wilderness areas of the Rocky Mountain states and British Columbia.

Status

Cougars have been extirpated from much of their former range, especially in the east. Though their distribution has been reduced considerably by expanding human populations and conflicting land uses, cougars do well where habitat exists. In the west, it continues to be found from southern Canada south through Latin America to Patagonia. Florida has cougars in the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp.

Cougars are considered big game in many of the western states. There are limited legal harvests in these areas that do not threaten local cougar populations. We in New York receive a few reports of cougar sightings each year from throughout the state.

In many instances it is a case of mistaken identity. Other cats, fishers or dogs are the animals probably seen. Once in a great while a real cougar is sighted. Based on our experiences, it is safe to assume that these animals have been intentionally or unintentionally released by people. Contrary to some peoples beliefs, they are not part of a native, self sustaining population. They leave tracks which would be regularly seen in any area frequented by them. If there were enough cougars for a population, there would be many sets of tracks readily available for people to see throughout the year.

Management and Research Needs

The remaining population of cougars in Florida is federally protected as an Endangered species. It is unlikely that any eastern state will reintroduce cougars; the required habitat is simply not available. Western cougars appear secure; the relatively vast amount of wilderness available to them will assure their continued survival.

Additional References

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