



Seeing a mountain lion in the wild is a rare experience, even though 7,000 call Colorado home. (Submitted photo/CPW)

Mountain lions in Colorado

In June of 2016, a 5-year-old boy was attacked by a mountain lion while playing outside of his home near Aspen, Colorado. The boy's mother physically removed him from the grasp of the lion. The boy and his mother both suffered serious injuries but were expected to recover. Talk about a close encounter.

Closer to home, a woman walking along the bike path of Cerise Park had an encounter with a lion. The cat came up from the bank of the Uncompahgre River and stood about 30 yards away, before disappearing into the trees.

Mountain lions, sometimes called a puma or cougar, are the fourth largest member of the cat family. A male lion can reach over 71/2 feet in length and weigh up to 220 pounds. The tail makes up about a third of the total length of the animal. The natural lifespan of a lion in the wild is around 12 years.

Mountain lions are a very stealthy animal. They move very quietly and can be extremely elusive. Lions live in primitive country with lots of cover, rarely exposing themselves. They are loners and prey on deer, elk calves and other small game animals. Cattlemen suffer a fair amount of livestock loss

each year to lion attacks.

Although few people actually ever see one, mountain lions are very common in Western Colorado. Attacks against humans are even more rare. According to Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), there have been less than 12 human fatalities from a lion attack in North America over the last 20 years. Hunters have a saying, "If you have deer, you have lions."

Young lions, which may have been forced to hunt on their own, commit most attacks. The young lion will usually target easy prey such as small pets. Young children, left unsupervised, could be at risk if a lion is in the area.

Lion encounters have increased in recent years. This is partly because people are encroaching onto their territory. As our urban sprawl moves us into lion habitat, their territory overlaps with ours. We have many hiking, biking, ATV and running trails along the fringes of metropolitan areas that pass directly through lion country.

This past November I was hunting elk in the Cimarron area and was amazed at the number of lion tracks in the area. At one point we counted five separate lions (by their different tracks)



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

moving in an area.

I walked a fair piece of real estate along a ridge. When I was atop the ridge, I gassed and rested for a while, staying maybe 45 minutes. When I went back down the ridge, I followed my footprints in the snow. On a stretch of the walk I noticed a lion had walked over my tracks. He followed me for about a quarter of a mile. I never knew he was there. To the good luck of all my creditors, he was just curious and not hungry.

Mountain lion populations seem to be on the increase in recent years. According to CPW, population estimates in Colorado range from 3,000 to 7,000. Personally, I have seen more lions in the last four years than in the last 35 combined.

The CPW has opened limited hunting seasons on them in recent years because of

the increase in numbers. Perspective hunters must take a class from CPW before a license can be purchased. This class teaches hunters how to identify the sex and size of a lion by its tracks and when the cat is actually seen.

There have been around 20 fatal attacks by lions in North America over the past 100 years. You have a better chance of getting killed by a lightning strike or a bee attack than cashing in from a lion. Knowing that, it does not make a face-to-face lion encounter any easier to take.

Although rare, an attack by a lion can rearrange your landscape at the very least or make you pay the full price plus tax at the worst. Here are a few things you can do to help prevent a lion encounter:

*Stay in groups when you walk or hike in lion country. Keep your children close and your pets on a leash. Make noise, like talking, so as not to surprise a lion.

*If you encounter a lion, stay calm. Do not run as it may trigger his attack instincts. Never approach the lion and make sure you leave him an escape route. Back away slowly from the scene.

*Try to appear larger by raising your arms or

opening your jacket. Pick up small children to keep them from running away in fear. Hold your pets close to you.

*If the lion becomes aggressive, fight back. Throw stones; swing a walking stick or jacket. Avoid crouching down or turning your back to him, staying upright at all times. Prey that fights back usually drives off lions.

*After a lion encounter, notify the Colorado Parks and Wildlife office immediately. An aggressive lion needs to be dealt with and it is best to let the professionals handle the situation.

Mountain lions are a very beautiful creature, and witnessing one in the wild is a rare occurrence. If you happen to see one, enjoy the beauty and stealth of the animal, just keep a safe distance.

For more information on Colorado Mountain Lions, check out the CPW website at www.cpw.state.co.us and until next time, and keep an eye out for kitty.

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In this wondrous season...

"... promise yourself to be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind. To talk health, happiness and prosperity to every person you meet. To make all your friends feel that there is something in them... to think only of the best, to work only for the best and to expect only the best... to wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile. To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others. To be too large for worry and too noble for anger..." - Christian D. Larson

Let the mother with small, tired children go ahead of you at the grocery store. Smile at everyone... it may be the only smile they receive that day. Above all else, be kind in all things...



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