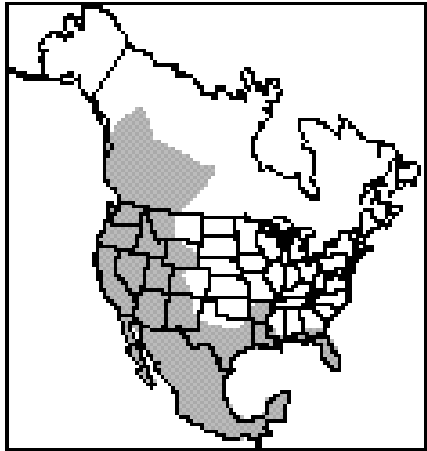


# LIVING with WILDLIFE

## Cougars



### North America Range

*Cougar range is mainly in western Canada and in western and southern United States. Small populations are found in the south from Texas to Florida. Sightings have occurred in the midwestern and eastern states.*



**Felis concolor**

### IDENTIFICATION

The cougar is a large cat native to North America. A cougar's head is small with a rounded face and ears. It has sharp teeth. It has forward facing eyes which help it to follow movement of prey. The lion's neck and body are long and narrow. A mountain lion's legs are very muscular and the hind legs are longer than the front legs. It has a long, cylindrical tail. There are two main colors of cougars: reddish brown and gray. Red cats can vary from buff, cinnamon and tawny to a very reddish brown color. Gray cats can vary from silver gray to bluish to slate gray. The sides of a mountain lion's muzzle are black and so is the tip of its tail. The upper lip, chin and throat are white. The coats of newborn **kittens** are covered with black spots which disappear as they grow. The male is larger than the female. Adult cougars range in length from 5 1/2 to 8 feet (30-36 inches is tail) and can weigh from 80 to 200 pounds.

### HABITAT

Mountain lions can be found in a variety of habitats including coniferous forests, wooded swamps, tropical forests, open grasslands, chaparral, brushland and desert edges. They seem to prefer rough, rocky, semi-open areas. Mountain lion and deer often share the same habitat.

### FOOD

Cougars are **carnivores**. Deer are their main source of food. They will also eat other prey ranging from mice to moose. Prey includes rabbits, hares, beaver, porcupines, skunks, martens, coyotes, peccaries, bear cubs, pronghorn antelope, Rocky Mountain goats, mountain sheep, elk, grouse, wild turkeys, fish, livestock and pets.

### HABITS

Cougars are shy and **elusive**. They hunt alone except during breeding season and when the female is traveling with her cubs. Lions are **nocturnal**, preferring to hunt at night. They stake out territories that range from 12 to 22 square miles. Dominant males commonly kill other males, females and kittens. Cougars are able to run quickly for short distances and are agile tree climbers.

Mountain lions do not have a definite breeding season. Mating can take place any time. The majority of births occur in late winter and early spring. After a gestation period of 90-96 days, one to five young are born. The kittens can eat meat at six weeks but usually nurse until about three months of age. The young usually hunt with their mother through their first winter.

*The cat with over 40 names, the mountain lion is commonly called cougar, puma, catamount, panther and painter.*

# Living in Harmony, Living in Conflict

## **Living in harmony . . .**

*Most of the time, mountain lions and humans live in harmony.*

- Cougars help control deer populations. - on average a cougar will eat a deer a week
- Cougars are an important predator in the food chain
- Cougars are a big game animal and are a challenge to hunt
- Because of the cougar's elusive nature, people enjoy trying to see one in the wild — some people enjoy just knowing that cougars are "out there"



## **Living in conflict . . .**

- Cougars will kill livestock
  - Cougars will kill pets
  - Cougars have attacked and killed humans
- Sometimes cougars kill animals people are trying to reintroduce into an area

# Preventing Damage Done by Cougars



It is possible to reduce damage done by cougars. Some control methods are:

- around livestock areas, install heavy, woven wire fences at least 10 feet high (overhead fencing may also be needed)
  - keep livestock in an enclosed barn
- remove brush and trees from within 1/4 mile of where livestock are kept
  - bright lights, flashing lights, barking dogs and changing the placement of scarecrow objects may temporarily scare lions away
  - trapping or shooting the offending animal.

*This is an example of a front paw track which is 3 1/2 inches wide by 3 inches long. The hind track is smaller than the front track. The retractable claws do not show and the front of the pad has a double humped look.*



*The only North American cat bigger than the cougar is the jaguar.*

# Human Safety

## If you encounter a lion . . .

Confrontations between humans and cougars have been increasing over the last 20 years. These encounters have resulted in injury and loss of human life. There are several theories as to why these encounters have increased. One is that there are more cougars now than 20 years ago and people are spending more time in cougar habitat — hiking, biking and camping. Also urban growth has eliminated some cougar habitat and in some cases provided habitat.

- Keep children close to you
- Do not approach a lion
- Do not run from or turn your back to a lion. Its instinct is to chase running animals.
- Do not crouch down or bend over — you look like prey when you do.
- Make yourself look bigger and speak loudly.
- Fight back if attacked.

# Legends and Folklore

The puma is found in most American Indian **mythology**. The cat's cunning, ability and strength are respected and admired by many tribes. The cougar is looked at as a protector or source of power to ward off disease or to excel as a hunter. Some tribes viewed the cougar as an omen of disaster.



buzzards to find the remains of lion kills. In Cheyenne legend there is a story of a woman who strayed into the woods mourning the death of her baby. Finding a den of motherless panther kittens, she gently pressed one close to her breast and affectionately stroked the tiny animal.

Apparently hungry, it began to suckle. The woman raised the kitten and in time it repaid her by killing deer and bringing the meat to share. After that, other Cheyenne women raised puma kittens for the same purpose.

Ancient Peruvians gave the name **puma** to some of their most famous families. The puma was worshipped and used as a symbol at feasts. Lion skins were used for dress to represent bravery. In the Inca civilization, districts, wards, cities and mountains were often named after the puma.

The cougar was considered a friend and provider to Cheyenne Indians who watched crows and

The wail of the cougar was a death warning to the Apaches and Walapais of Arizona. Their medicine men dangled dried paws and claws of cougars over sick members of the tribe to ward off evil spirits.

## Your turn . . .

### Alliteration . . .

Using two or more words with the same beginning sound is an alliteration. Develop sentences about cougars using an alliteration and the many names for this animal.

For example:

*The coffee colored cougar crouched carefully.*

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**Across:** 2. carnivore, 5. elusive, 7. panther, 9. alliteration  
**DOWN:** 1. deer, 2. cougar, 3. nocturnal, 4. puma, 6. mythology, 8. kittens

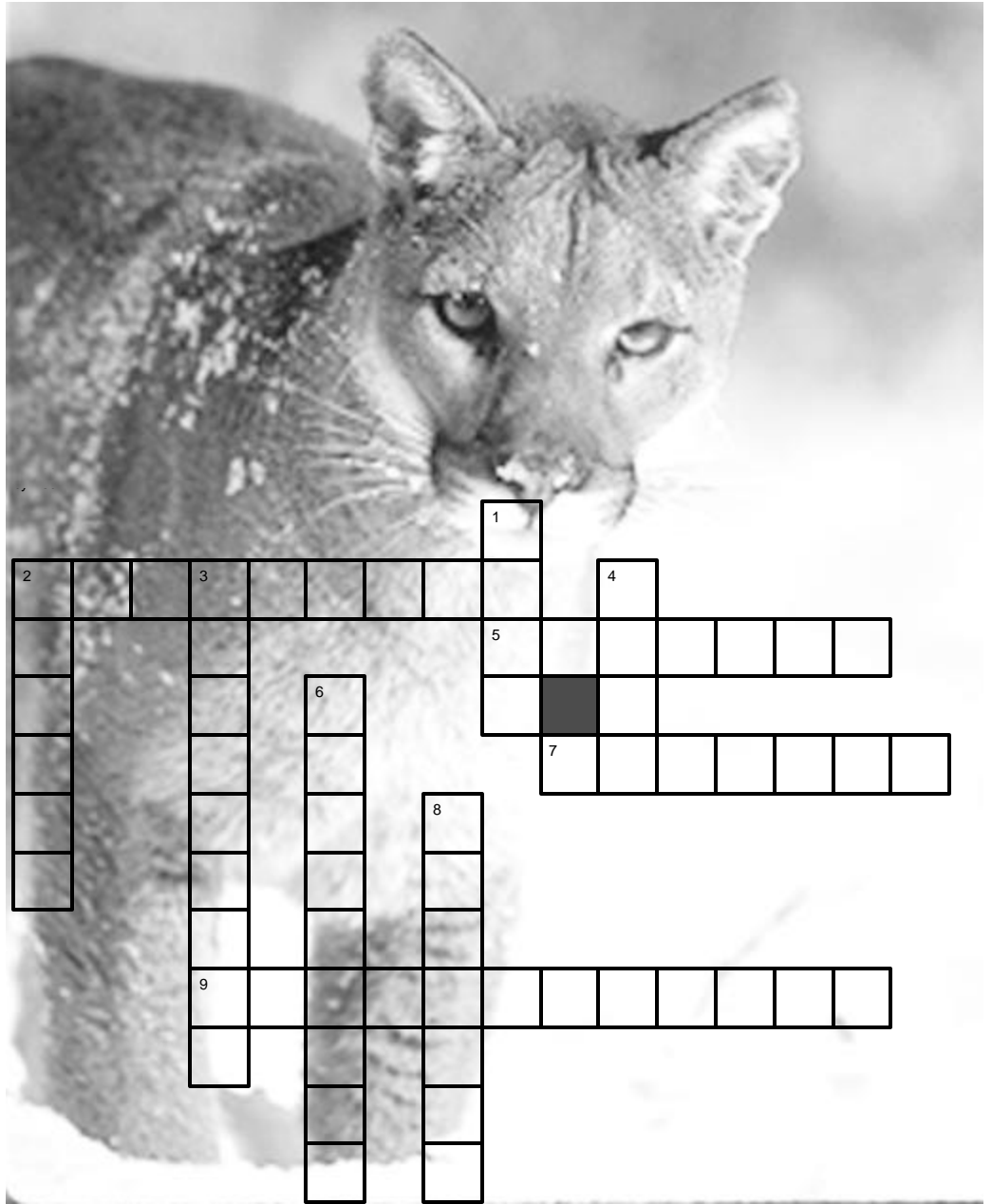
# CROSSWORD REVIEW

## ACROSS

2. an animal that eats meat is called a \_\_\_\_\_
5. an animal that is not seen very much is called \_\_\_\_\_
7. another name for mountain lion that is commonly used in the east
9. using the same beginning sound in two or more words

**DOWN**

1. most common prey of cougars
2. another name for mountain lion often used in the Pacific Northwest
3. an animal active at night is called this
4. another name for mountain lion used by Peruvian Indians
6. having to do with myths
8. the young of a mountain lion are called



## ***Additional Resources***

Wildlife Activity Book and  
1998 Wildlife Issue of the  
Colorado Reader  
Colorado Foundation for  
Agriculture  
P.O. Box 10  
Livermore, CO 80536

Prevention and Control of  
Wildlife Damage CD ROM  
or Handbook  
202 Natural Resource Hall  
University of Nebraska  
P.O. Box 83819  
Lincoln, NE 68583

Jack H. Berryman Institute  
for Wildlife Damage  
Management  
Utah State University  
Logan, Utah 84331-5210

***This activity sheet has been developed by USDA Wildlife Services. For more information about cougars contact your state's Wildlife Services office or USDA Wildlife Services at (301) 734-7921***