



ENDANGERED SPECIES

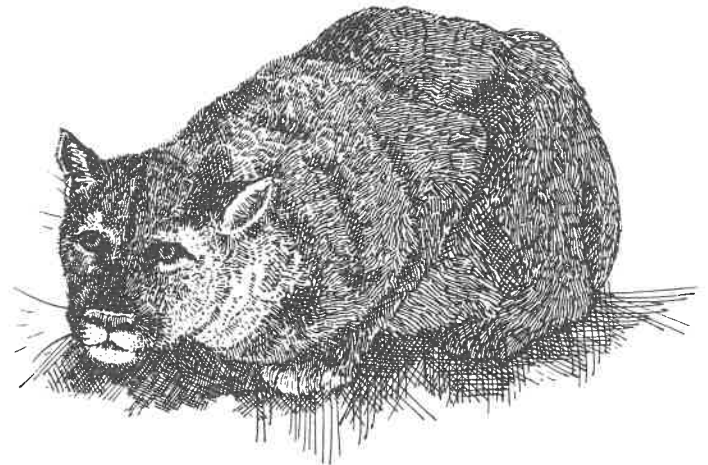
Status: State Threatened

MOUNTAIN LION

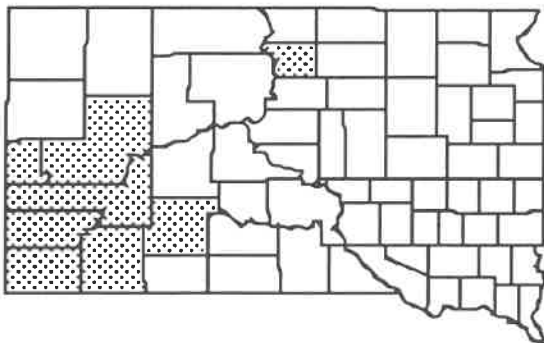
(*Felis concolor*)

Description

The largest cat species of North America is known by many names; puma, cougar, mountain lion, and the scientific name, *Felis concolor*, meaning "cat of one color." These large predators are tawny-brown with lighter colored fur on chest and underside, and a long, dark-tipped tail that is about 1/3 the total length of the body. Kittens are spotted and gradually lose these camouflage markings as they mature. Adult lions measure 72 to 90 inches (183-229 cm) from nose to tip of tail. They stand 26 to 31 inches (66-79 cm) at the shoulder, about the same height as a German shepherd dog. Males weigh 140 to 160 pounds (63 to 73 kilograms), with females being smaller, weighing from 90 and 110 pounds (41 to 50 kg).



Distribution



**Mountain Lion Sightings
or Collection Sites**

Historically, mountain lions have been reported in our state from the Missouri River westward. However, human settlement and bounty hunting pushed the species out of its original range, not only in South Dakota, but all over the west. Lions are now found primarily in rugged, sparsely populated areas (see map).

Natural History

Because of their secretive habits, mountain lions are not seen often in South Dakota. They are most active from dusk until dawn. It is more likely to see signs left by lions such as scratch marks high on trees, food caches where a kill has been partially eaten and then covered with brush and dirt, footprints in the mud or snow, and scat (droppings).

Vocalizations are uncommon, and occur mostly during the breeding season or when the animal feels threatened.

Males have a *home range* averaging 25 to 35 square miles (65-90 square km) while females cover 15 to 30 square miles (40-80 square km). *Home range* size varies greatly depending on geography, season, and availability of prey. Lions are very territorial. *Territory* size depends on the sex of the cat, the type of *habitat*, and the ease of finding prey. Territory boundaries are marked with scrapes and urine scent posts made from piles of natural debris that serve as *olfactory* and visual warnings to other cats that the *territory* is occupied. The only times that two lions are peacefully in the same *territory* are during courtship and breeding, or when a female is with her kittens.

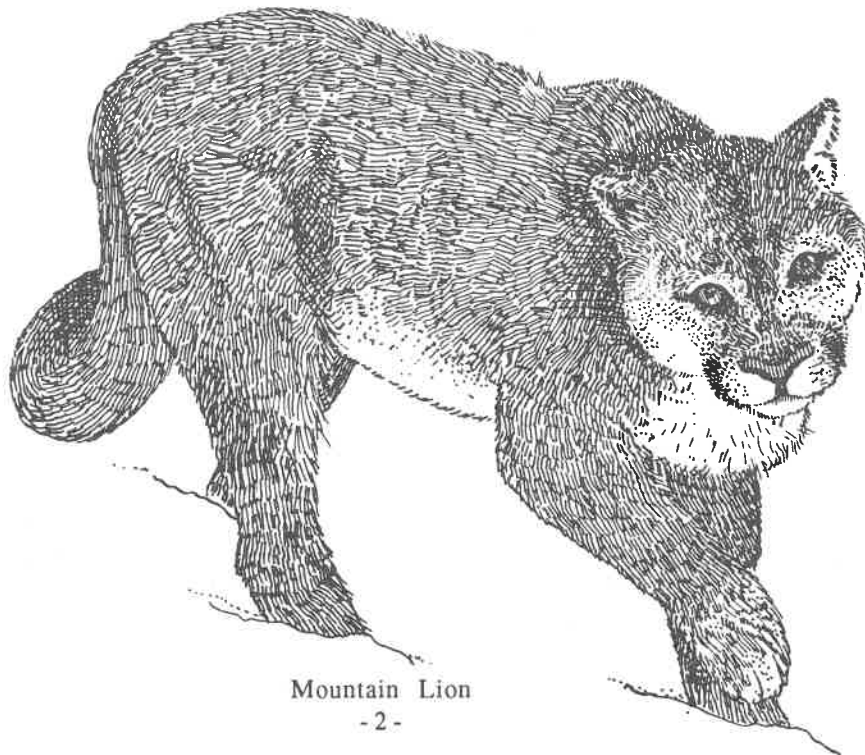
Male cats are *polygamous* and will breed throughout the year. Courtship lasts up to two weeks. After breeding, the male will move out of the female's *territory*. After a gestation period of 90 to 96 days, the females give birth to 1 to 6 kittens in a well hidden thicket, cave or rocky depression. Kittens remain with their mother for as long as 18 months. She will eventually drive them out of her *territory*, and they must roam until they can

establish a *territory* of their own. This time of wandering is when the juveniles get in to the most trouble. Being inexperienced, they will not have a choice *territory*, and will occasionally approach humans or towns. A female mountain lion will not breed until she has an established *territory*.

As a large carnivore, the lion prefers large prey. Research in other western states indicates that 80 to 90% of a lion's diet is deer. On average an adult with an established *territory* will kill one deer per week. Other prey species include elk and smaller mammals. What the lion does not eat is used by other predators and scavengers, such as coyotes, foxes, hawks, eagles and crows. Mountain lions will kill and eat domestic livestock. In our state, lions that attack livestock can be legally destroyed within the restrictions outlined in SD state statute 34A-8-11.

Significance

Mountain lions are a natural part of the ecosystem in South Dakota, but their role at the top of the food chain puts them in direct competition with humans. Their value lies principally in maintaining biological diversity.



Mountain Lion

Conservation Measures

Mountain lions are experiencing a loss of *habitat*. They are often forced to live closer to humans, and this creates an increased chance of lion/human interaction. In South Dakota, lions are occasionally seen near a town, but they are more frequently reported by ranchers and recreationalists in remote areas of the Black Hills and Badlands.

Since 1985, mountain lions have been classified as a threatened species in our state. There are not enough data to accurately determine the size of the South Dakota population. The mountain lion of the western U.S. is not currently on the federal list of endangered and threatened species, and other western states do have large enough populations to allow hunting of the species, without detriment to the overall number.

Glossary

Habitat - the arrangement of food, water, shelter or cover, and space suitable to the needs of a living thing.

Home range - the area in which an animal travels in the scope of normal activities.

Olfactory - referring to the sense of smell.

Polygamous - having more than one mate.

Territory - the concept of "ownership" or dominance over a unit of habitat; an area defended by an animal against others of the same species; used for breeding, feeding, or both.

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