

UC SANTA BARBARA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Mountain Lion Guidelines

UCSB GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSMENT OF REPORTED MOUNTAIN LION SIGHTINGS AND ENCOUNTERS

IDENTIFICATIONS: Many animals are mistaken for mountain lions, including bobcats, deer, and domestic dogs and cats.

- Size similar to a large dog, like a German Shepherd or larger
- Adult males in the Santa Barbara mountains weight 120-135 pounds, while adult females weigh 75-90 pounds
- Color tawny (yellowish-brown) to light cinnamon; chest and underside are white
- Long tail, measuring about one third of total body length
- Usually solitary, except for: (1) breeding pair of male and female, (2) siblings that have recently left their mother, and (3) females with kittens
- Kittens stay with their mother until that are 1^{1/2} years old and full-grown. Small kittens are spotted. There are usually 2-3 kittens per litter.

OBSERVED BEHAVIORS: A mountain lion sighting is not inherently dangerous. The mountain lion's behavior and "body language" are key to interpreting risk level. There are generally 2 ways a dangerous situation may occur: (1) Lion is protecting something (i.e. food, kittens, or itself if it feels trapped), or (2) Lion is hunting and considers person as potential food

Low Risk:

- Mountain lion not paying attention to person, its movements are not directed toward the person, or the mountain lion is opportunistically viewed at a distance
- Mountain lion runs away or hides
- Mountain lion in a tree

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Moderate Risk: Risk of escalation to “High Risk” may increase at shorter distances between person and mountain lion. These behaviors may indicate lion activities that could affect other people in the area if they crossed paths with the lion.

- Various body positions indicating attention is being paid to the person, such as:
 - Focused watching of person
 - Ears up and focused forward
 - Shifting body position with attention focused on person
 - Following the person (note: cougar may simply be curious, or assessing whether someone is suitable prey, or defensively “escorting” them from an important site such as kittens or food)

High Risk: Attack may be imminent

- Hunting behavior: stalking, crouching, tail twitching, body low to ground, rear legs are “pumping”
- Defensive behavior: ears flattened like wings, teeth bared, hissing, snarling, charging short distances toward person

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Wildlife.ca.gov/Keep-Me-Wild/Lion
- Wildfutures.us@gmail.com