



**New Mexico  
Wildlife Center**

## *The Big Cats*

*Puma concolor* (mountain lion)

It isn't often that we get to see a mountain lion up close. They are shy and quiet. When we do find ourselves in the company of one of these great predators we are generally charged with a mix of excitement and fear. The worst thing that can happen to large mammal predators is that they become habituated to humans, lose their wariness of us, associate our presence with the availability of food. "A habituated mountain lion is a dead mountain lion". Never ever feed them or do anything to make them think humans are anything but dangerous.

Mountain lions need a lot of space and as we infringe upon their space we can expect an increase in encounters. Lions are not going to be attracted to garbage but they may find your property attractive because of a water source, or other wildlife, like rabbits, that find shelter in your yard. They may just be crossing through your property on their way to a den or food source or water source. They may be a young cat looking for a new territory. Generally speaking if you do not have a food source, denning spot or water source they will not stay. Only females with young use a permanent den.

Mountain lions prefer habitats that provide cover. It may be brush or forested areas or rocky outcroppings and canyons. They hunt by stalking prey and this is best accomplished if they have cover. Their preferred diet is deer but they will eat a wide variety of animals from rodents to reptiles to bighorn sheep.

Females generally give birth to three or four spotted kittens. The kittens may be tutored by the mother for as long as a year and a half. Often she will take a year off before raising another family. Mountain lions may live eight to ten years in the wild.

### Precautions:

- If you live in mountain lion country, clear out areas of brush or other vegetation that might provide cover.
- Dawn and dusk are preferred hunting times for mountain lions, be extra vigilant at these times especially when walking with small children.
- Hike with a dog on a leash
- Hike with others

If you encounter a mountain lion:

- Pick up small children
- Stay standing
- Keep eye contact and back away slowly
- DO NOT RUN
- Act aggressively, wave arms, wave a walking stick
- If attacked—fight and try to remain standing!