



## Natural history of mountain lions in the U.S.

Mountain lions are rare native carnivores that now live in only a fraction of their historic range in the U.S. Researchers continue to learn about the natural history of these incredible wild cats including what they need to survive and how they care for their kittens.

### Physical characteristics of mountain lions

Mountain lions (*Puma concolor*) – also known in the U.S. as cougars, pumas, panthers and catamounts – are large felids, or cats, native to the Americas. They are the fourth largest cat in the world and the second largest native North American cat after the jaguar. The sexes look alike, though males are larger than females. An adult male can weigh 110 to 180 pounds and an adult female 80 to 130 pounds. Males can measure 6 to 9.5 feet from nose to tail tip and females 5 to 7 feet. They typically live less than 12 years in the wild.

While the coloring of adult mountain lions can vary by individual, region and season, they tend to be tawny, reddish-brown, or grayish-brown in color, with creamy white accents on the chin, throat, chest and belly. Kittens are born with black spots on reddish-brown to grayish-brown colored coats. The spotting helps camouflage kittens and keep them protected from predators. The spots slowly disappear by two years of age.

### Where mountain lions roam: Habitat & range

Mountain lions live in a wide variety of habitats such as forests, deserts and mountain ranges. Even so, they tend to prefer rough terrain with moderately dense, low vegetation. Mountain lions require three essential habitat characteristics:

- Freedom from excessive human interference
- Adequate prey
- Ambush or stalking cover

Mountain lions require large habitats and maintain home ranges that overlap with each other. Lions are not a densely populated species because their prey, such as deer and elk, often occur at low densities. Lion populations decline when their prey populations decrease, or by competition from other native carnivores for limited prey. This makes the species sensitive to both bottom-up (e.g., prey declines) and top-down (e.g., human persecution) influences.



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY**  
OF THE UNITED STATES

