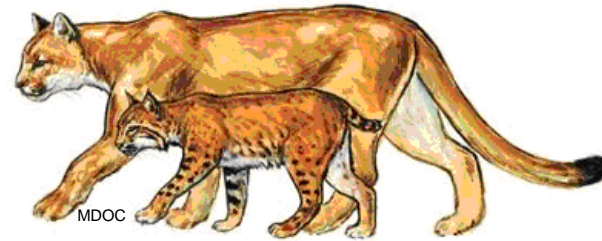


lions have been present since settlement, between 85% and 95% are considered mistaken identity. In Iowa, it is likely that over 95% of the reports are mistaken identity. Usually mountain lions are mistaken for yellow lab or shepherd dogs, bobcats, feral house cats or deer. Many reports occur at night, in very poor lighting conditions, poor weather conditions or at very far distances



Bobcats are often mistaken for their larger mountain lion relatives. They share many physical and behavioral traits. The mountain lion have a long tail (2½ -3 feet), while the bobcat have a short tail (less than 10 inches). Bobcats are 3 feet in length, while adult male mountain lions are 7-9 feet. Mountain lions weigh 90-160 pounds, while bobcats weigh 20-30 pounds. Bobcats tend to be darker brown, with lighter belly fur and spots while mountain lions tend to be a more uniform brown, tawny color. Although difficult to see at a distance, bobcats have tufts on their ears and facial cheeks. Yellow Labrador and German Shepherd dogs have different physical features with less massive shoulders and hindquarters, a longer furred non-cylindrical tail, with longer fur over the rest of the body. Two legislative efforts have been made to place the mountain lion and black bear in the Iowa code as designated wildlife species, but in an agricultural state like Iowa, it soon became very

political and failed both times. This effort, however, does need to be explored and pursued further within the constraints and limits of the tolerance of human kind. Besides the possibility of mountain lions dispersing from western and southern states, there are privately owned mountain lions that could have either escaped or been released. In order to have a privately owned mountain lion, a permit must be obtained from the State Dept. of Agriculture. Several states bordering Iowa have also reported the same scenario.

**CONTACTS FOR REPORTING MOUNTAIN LION SIGHTINGS**

Even though Iowa Code does not list the mountain lion or black bear as designated wildlife, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources is the logical agency to report killed mountain lions. It is very valuable to the DNR to collect as much scientific data from any dead mountain lion that turn up in the state. If a mountain report can be substantiated with strong evidence (video, photo, photo of track or DNA material), the DNR should also be contacted. Information on where to contact your local DNR personnel can be found via the Iowa DNR website at [www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov) or via the telephone information directory. It is important that the DNR obtain as much information as possible to further manage the possible presence of mountain lions in the state. Before we visit the site, we do try to validate the observation with telephone conversations.

**MOUNTAIN LIONS IN IOWA**

*(Felis concolor)*



Vince Evelsizer (Furbearer Biologist)  
Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources  
1203 North Shore Drive  
Clear Lake, IA 50428  
Office (641) 357-3517  
[www.iowadnr.gov](http://www.iowadnr.gov)



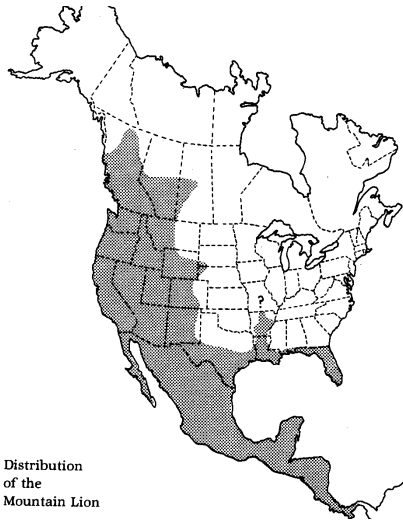
**CURRENT STATUS OF MOUNTAIN LIONS IN IOWA**

Mountain lions have no legal wildlife status in Iowa. That means that they can be taken and possessed by anyone at anytime as long as legal methods and means are used to take the animal. Mountain lions and black bears are not listed in the Iowa Code as designated wildlife species, because they were extirpated before fish and game legislation became prominent. The pioneers did not see their presence of any value to their own way of life, so basically persecution by humans brought their demise. In the late 1990's, the DNR began to receive several reports of mountain lions in the state.

The DNA results of the first 3 dead mountain lions, as well as the lack of worn claws or broken teeth, indicates that all 3 dead animals in Iowa are of wild western origin. Numerous other fake photos of so called Iowa mountain lions are circulating the internet. We have also had several, what appear to be mountain lion tracks in the state. Over 1,500 mountain lions have been reported to DNR personnel since 2000 but most have no substantial evidence to back them up. Numerous additional sightings have been reported, but are not mapped because of less than credible information. Strong evidence consists of a photo or video of the animal, photo of its track, a scat or animal dropping, or some sort of DNA evidence. In the western states, where mountain

## HISTORY

Mountain lions are often times referred to as cougars, pumas, panthers, painters, and catamounts. They are the largest of three wildcats historically documented in Iowa. The lynx and the bobcat are the other two. The mountain lion probably occurred throughout the state, but nowhere in great numbers. The last historical record of a mountain lion in Iowa appears to be near Cincinnati, Iowa in Appanoose County where one was shot in 1867.



## DESCRIPTION

The mountain lion is a very large, slender cat with a small head, small rounded ears that are not tufted, very powerful shoulders and hindquarters, and a long, heavy, cylindrical tail. Adults are 6-9 feet in length including the tail which is 2½-3 feet in length. Males weigh 140-160 pounds and females weigh 90-110 pounds.

The mountain lion is grizzled gray to cinnamon tawny brown in color, and the last 2 inches of the tail are black.

## BIOLOGY

Mountain lions are usually 3 years old before reaching reproductive maturity and usually have young (kits) at 2 year intervals. Kits can be born any time throughout the year but the peak period is summer. They will average 2-3 kits per litter

and kits have brown spots on a buff color. Adults are very capable of swimming. Mountain lions can readily climb trees to escape dogs or obtain food. Female home ranges average 90 square miles while male home ranges average 300 square miles. Longevity is 12-20 years, but only a few live longer than 12 years. Mountain lions have an interesting social hierarchy. Dominant males have their harem of females and occasionally young males will challenge the dominant male for females. The younger males usually are forced out and leave the area, basically becoming nomads of the landscape, most likely searching for the presence of females. Mountain lions can move several hundred miles in a very short period of time. **ALTHOUGH RUMORS WILL CONTINUE, BE ASSURED, THE IOWA DNR HAS NOT RELEASED MOUNTAIN LIONS IN IOWA AND HAVE NO INTENTION OF DOING SO.**

## FOOD HABITS

Mountain lions favorite food items are small mammals and deer. Like all predators they are opportunists and will also take any small mammals or birds. They rarely take livestock. They are ambush predators, taking large prey by a bite on the back of the neck or throat. They sometimes will carry a prey item to cover and forage first on the liver, heart and lungs. If they cannot consume the entire kill all at once, they will cache it (cover and camouflage) and return later to feed again. Mountain lions prefer fresh meat and once the cached food items become tainted, the rest is left for scavengers such as coyotes, turkey vultures, and crows to feast upon.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH A MOUNTAIN LION

In the past 150 years, 19 U.S. human fatalities have occurred from mountain lion attacks. Fortunately, none have occurred in Iowa. Generally a mountain lion will sense human presence before humans know they are in the area and the mountain lions will quickly vacate the area. However, if one has an unexpected rare encounter with a mountain lion (we anticipate this

will rarely happen in Iowa, because there are so few animals in the state) the following is recommended:

- 1) **DON'T RUN!** Running will stimulate certain animals to chase you (like a dog that wants to bite you, especially if you run).
- 2) **Stand tall, look big, puff up, and lift your coat over your shoulders.**
- 3) **Take control of the situation. Scream loudly, throw objects.**
- 4) **Gather children in close and slowly back away keeping your eye of the animal.**
- 5) **If attacked, fight back vigorously with sharp objects and poke the eyes of the animal.**

Urban sprawl into mountain lion country in the west has caused more human encounters with mountain lions. People in the western states that have been attacked are usually unaware of mountain lion presence and are usually cross-country skiing, jogging, or biking. Again the animal is probably surprised by the presence of these folks and the fast movement away from the mountain lion stimulates the animal to chase the fast moving person and sometimes attack.

## THE FUTURE OF MOUNTAIN LIONS IN IOWA

The mountain lions will remain difficult to manage both from a biological and political standpoint. It is doubtful that the mountain lion will ever have much presence in Iowa. First of all there is some question about whether Iowa actual good mountain lion habitat. The tolerance or intolerance of humans will dictate whether they will ever be able to get a foot hold in the state. Some sort of legal status in the Iowa Code will be necessary. In the meantime, their possible presence in Iowa has generated considerable excitement both pro and con and only time will tell whether they once again will become designated wildlife in the state.

