

Living with Wildlife in BC

COUGAR #2

“Living with Wildlife” is a series of nine wildlife management guides for the agricultural and natural resource sectors, as well as rural land owners. Options for wildlife management, worker safety, and animal deterrents are provided for each species. Many guides suggest completing wildlife conflict management plans. Web links to the guides and other resources are on the back page. Consult the “*Conflict Reduction Guide*” for wildlife deterrent management options.



Cougar: *Puma Concolor*

Cougars are well-known for their elusive nature and incredible hunting skills. Cougars are Canada's largest feline predator, highly adaptable and found throughout almost all habitats. Historically, cougar sightings are rare, but as prey opportunities near urban areas expand, and human activities spread further into natural areas, cougars are increasingly coming into contact with humans.

Cougar:

- Can be a range of golden, yellow and brown shades with some black points.
- Approximate height to shoulder is 76.2 cm/2.5 ft. Males can reach up to 233 cm/7.9 ft. in length from nose to tip of tail and weigh between 65 - 90kg/140 - 200 lbs. Females reach up to 203 cm/6.7 ft. and weigh between 40 - 60kg/88 - 125 lbs.
- Will locate their dens on ledges, in tree hollows, on steep slopes, under fallen logs or in between rocks. Dens are kept tidy and free of litter and bones.
- Can mate all year, but generally do so between March and June, giving birth to 2-4 kittens three months later. Kittens will nurse for three months before being introduced to meat. They will stay with their mother for up to 2 years.
- Lifespan is between 8 and 13 years.
- Have hind legs longer than their front legs, giving them maximum leaping power. A cougar can leap up to 8.9m/24 ft. the length of a small bus and up to 3.5m/12 ft. vertically in a single jump.
- Are excellent climbers and can run up to a speed of 70 km/43 mph for short distances.
- Are meat eaters and will drag a new kill to a sheltered area to feed. After a meal, the kill is covered with dirt and forest debris until the cougar returns to feed again. Cougars will feed on the internal organs of a kill first (heart, liver, lungs), while coyotes and wolves begin with the tail end of a kill.
- Scat almost always contains hair and bone fragments and are usually partially covered by dirt or leaves.
- Mark their territory with urine soaked piles or heaps of dirt, leaves or other forest debris.
- Are good swimmers and can swim up to 5 km/3 miles.
- Have night vision 6 times better than humans.

On the Land



Management Options

A Wildlife Conflict Management Plan advises:

- Keep a tidy operation: avoid attracting prey species such as deer and raccoon by keeping the farm/vineyard clean. Attracting deer may also attract cougars.
- Clear vegetation and shrubs along the perimeter of the property to maintain a clear line-of-sight.
- Keep children within sight.
- Work in groups.
- Keep pets on a leash. Cougars are opportunistic hunters and unsupervised pets are good prey.
- Animal feed and shelters are a major attractant. Keep corrals, pens and runs clean and secure all feed, feed additives, and supplies.
- Consider installing an electric fence.

See the Environmental Farm Plan chapter 3

<http://www.bcac.bc.ca/ardcorp/program/environmental-farm-plan-program>

Cougars have long roamed the wilderness of British Columbia at the top of the food chain. Cougars will generally sense human presence long before visual contact is made, but it is important to know what to do in the case of an encounter. Prevention is always the best method to avoid wildlife encounters.

Cougars hunt all year long, prefer to hunt at dawn and dusk, but will hunt at any time if necessary. Damage incurred by cougars is mostly in the form of lost livestock and pets, and is on the increase. Many encounters are a result of attracting their prey species such as deer or large rodents to a property. What may seem like a golden opportunity for a cougar in the form of an easy meal often leads to its death.

In order to maintain a healthy cougar population, we must avoid encounters by managing our properties accordingly. Cougars will hunt any prey species when the opportunity arises, but they are also easily intimidated and will back away at the first sign of potential injury. Cougars cannot afford to be injured as they rely entirely on their ability to hunt.

A Wildlife Conflict Management Plan can reduce the incidence of damage or trespass from wildlife. A management plan includes:

- an on-site evaluation to assess past and current operations by identifying potential conflict sites and safety concerns:
- Property points:
 - a. outbuilding, worker shelters, and shed vulnerability
 - b. eating, break - time or campsite areas
 - c. worker safety
- once the evaluation is complete, conflict reduction options can be explored and a plan can be implemented
- assign a person to implement the plan including worker education

On-site evaluations and forms can be accessed by agricultural operators. Contact:



Worker Safety

Farms, orchards, vineyards and livestock operations are often located in wildlife interface or natural areas where wildlife live. It is important to understand which predators or wildlife conflict situations may occur where you are working and be prepared to keep yourself and others safe.

Having a **Worker Action Plan** is the best defence to avoid encounters.

As part of personal safety, research and ask your employer for information on the on the wildlife you are most likely to encounter. Understand cougar biology and behaviour traits.

To avoid an encounter:

Be Alert: keep a watchful eye out for movement or activity on the perimeter of the work area and be prepared to alert others.

Watch for signs: tracks, scent piles, caches (kill covered in dirt and debris), scratches in trees and scat are all signs of recent activity. Learn how to identify these signs and avoid areas where they have been recently observed.

Avoid: attracting prey species.

Keep pets on a leash: dogs are a good first warning of intruders, but can also be prey. Keep pets indoors or close by at night.

If an encounter occurs:

Stay calm: talk in a calm, strong voice that helps identify you as a human as well as keeps you calm.

Remember: a cougars is a stalker and most likely will approach from behind.

Never approach a cougar: they generally avoid conflict but are unpredictable. Always make sure the cougar has an easy escape route. A cornered cougar is more likely to be aggressive.

Pick up your children: as children that are frightened and run may trigger an attack.

Don't run: the sudden movement could trigger an attack.

Never: turn your back to a cougar.

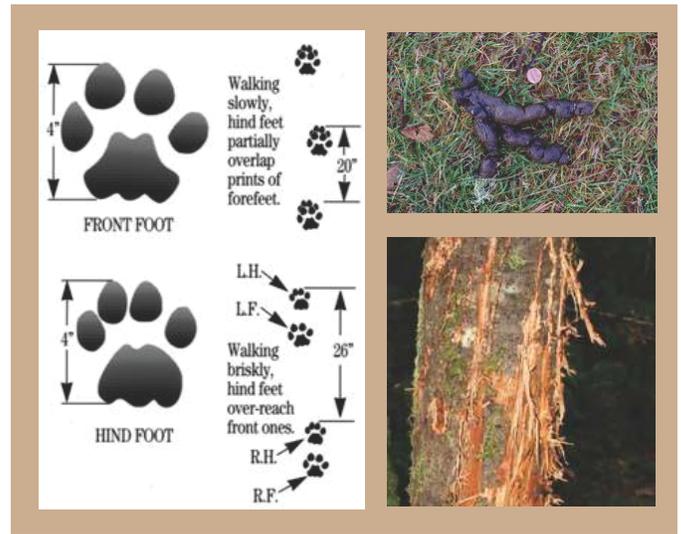
Use non-lethal deterrents: like bear spray.

If the cougar is still aggressive: act as large and intimidating as possible, use anything close at hand to act intimidating like tools, farm implements, sticks and rocks.

If the cougar attacks, fight back!

Cougars are very cautious and will not risk getting hurt.

Cougar attacks are extremely rare, but knowing how to respond may save yourself and others.



DO

- ✓ be aware; have a plan and know what to do
- ✓ always position a designated lookout when sightings have occurred and work in groups
- ✓ keep pets on a leash and children nearby
- ✓ carry pepper spray, audible scare devices and know how to use them

DON'T

- ✗ work alone
- ✗ let pets and children roam out of sight
- ✗ leave pets or pet food out overnight
- ✗ work in an area where there is a food cache or a recent sighting
- ✗ wear earphones or anything else that deadens surrounding sounds

Contacts & Resources

“Living with Wildlife in BC” management guide series:

- # 1 Bear
 - #2 Cougar
 - #3 Coyote & Wolf
 - #4 Rodents
 - #5 Snakes
 - #6 Starlings
 - #7 Ungulates
 - #8 Conflict Reduction: mitigation options for wildlife safety and control
- Mitigation Decision Matrix: calendar of wildlife occurrences and recommended controls

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The “Living with Wildlife” series is available for downloading and distribution (personal, noncommercial use) on the following websites:

www.osca.org “Living With Wildlife” pages
<http://www.rdos.bc.ca/departments/public-works/wildsafe-bc-bear-aware/>
www.bcwgc.org Health and Safety Section

Wildlife Deterrent retailers for fencing:

Margo Supplies <http://margosupplies.com/public/canadian1/index.html>
R&S Power Fence 645 Main St. Penticton, BC V2A 5C9 250-492-7090 <http://electricfence.homestead.com/>

Wildlife Deterrent retailers for devices and kits:

Margo Supplies <http://margosupplies.com/public/canadian1/index.html>
True North Outdoors Store <http://trueoutdoors.ca/> Vernon, Kamloops Kelowna, Penticton
Bear Scare (training courses available as well) <http://www.bearscares.ca/>

Resources:

Bear Aware Web Site <http://www.bearaware.bc.ca>
WildSafeBC web Site <http://learn.wildsafebc.com/index.php>
BC Conservation Officer Service <http://bit.ly/COServiceHumanWildlifeConflict>

Bear Spray is available at most Outdoors Stores, Hunting Outfitters, and Canadian Tire
Deer/Dog Spray is available at Canadian Tire Stores across BC (not restricted)

Wildlife Encounter Safety or information videos:

Cougar: <http://bit.ly/coloradostatecougar>

References and credits:

Biology - BC Conservation Officer website -<http://bit.ly/COServiceHumanWildlifeConflict>
Safety - BC Conservation Officer website -<http://bit.ly/COServiceHumanWildlifeConflict>
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