



David Foster

# PUMAS OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Agriculture and Natural Resources

# PUMAS ARE NATIVE CARNIVORES IN SAN MATEO COUNTY



*Also called mountain lions, cougars, or panthers  
- they are all the same species!*

Pumas like to stay hidden, preferring areas of connected cover provided by bushes, creeks, drainages, and areas with dense vegetation.

Creeks and ravines are often used as corridors through otherwise open or developed areas.

Pumas try to avoid people and are most active at night between **dusk** and **dawn**.

## PUMAS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ECOLOGICAL ROLE

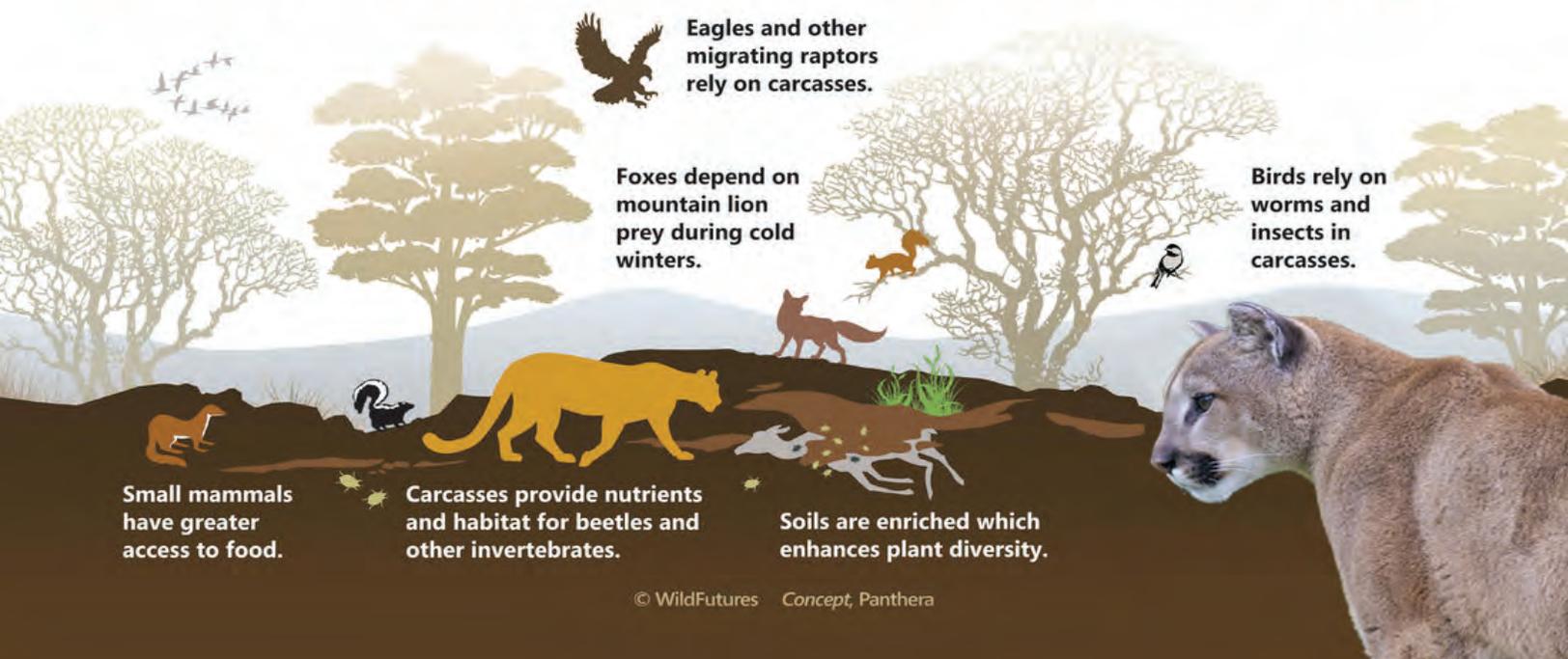
In San Mateo County, pumas are currently the only large carnivore and primary predator of deer. By hunting deer, pumas influence deer movement. Their leftovers also provide food for many other species, such as turkey vultures, eagles, and beetles.

Pumas cannot roar, but they can purr. They also can make a caterwaul, which can easily be mistaken for a human cry or scream. Females caterwaul when they are ready to mate.. Young kittens make birdlike chirps and mews.

## Pumas are important to a healthy ecosystem!

Taking steps to avoid conflict will protect pets, livestock, and wildlife.

## Mountain Lions Increase an Ecosystem's Health and Biodiversity

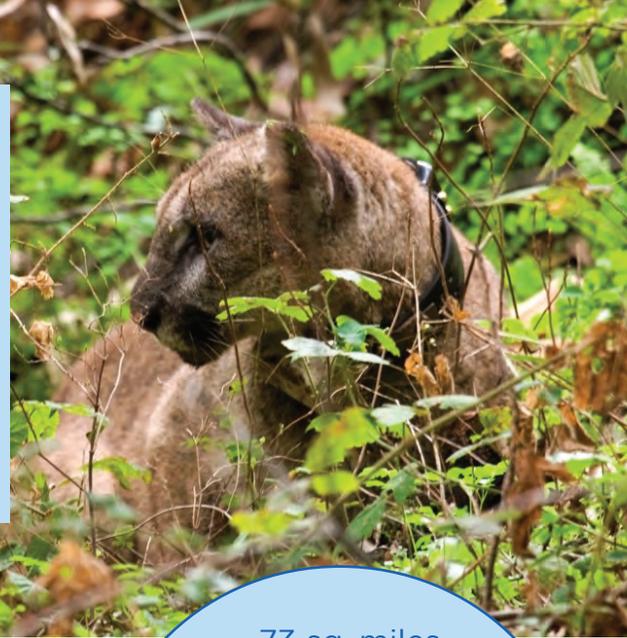


# PUMAS...

 ...can jump 15 feet high and 40 feet across

 ...can fit through a 7-inch diameter hole

 ...are most active between dusk and dawn



## Pumas have large territories and occur at low densities.

A male's territory typically overlaps with multiple females' territories. UC Santa Cruz Puma Project has found that in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the average territory size is 73 sq. miles for males and 30 sq. miles for females.



## Males and females spend 2 to 3 days together when they are breeding.

Kittens can be born any time of year and stay with their mom until they are 12 to 18 months old. If you find a kitten, do not touch or attempt to catch it. Report it to California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) at (707) 944-5531

## Bobcats are often mistaken for pumas.

In photos, it can be difficult to tell the animal's size; the best way to differentiate the two species is by tail length - bobcats have short tails while pumas have very long tails.



# HOW TO KEEP YOUR PETS SAFE

*Add these strategies to your pet care routine:*



The safest place for a cat is indoors, especially between dusk and dawn.

Build an outdoor enclosed area, like a “catio” to give your cats the benefit of being outside but the safety of being inside.

Keep dogs leashed. Pay attention to their behavior as dogs can often sense wildlife long before you do.

Feed your pets inside and keep pet food in a secure and locked container. Accessible pet food often attracts smaller mammals such as raccoons and rats, which then can attract larger predators like coyotes and pumas.



## *Steps to take while hiking or biking:*

- Hike in pairs or groups, especially if hiking between dusk and dawn
- Wear a helmet when mountain biking
- Keep young children close



## ***SPOT A PUMA? FOLLOW THESE STEPS!***

**Encountering a puma in the wild is rare and they typically are not a threat to people. Attacks on people are incredibly rare. Enjoy the sighting and consider these general safety guidelines:**

-  If you encounter a puma, **never approach it and never run from it.** Pick up small children without turning your back to the puma. Leave the puma an escape route.
-  If the puma approaches or acts aggressively toward you, **wave your arms to look bigger, shout, and throw rocks, a water bottle, or backpack if it attacks.**
-  If attacked, **fight back.** Pumas have given up on attacks when people fought back.



All Hands Ecology

**In San Mateo County, pumas primarily eat deer.**

However, they will also feed on almost any other animals including coyote, rodents, and raccoons.



Pumas typically drag their prey to an area with cover to feed. Remains will often be “cached” (covered with sticks and soil) for them to **return to feed on every night until the carcass is fully consumed.**



Kate Remsen

**Any puma that comes across *unprotected* pets or livestock may view them as prey - *this is not unusual behavior.***

**Killing a puma for preying on pets or livestock causes the vacant territory to be filled by one or more pumas and *does not solve* the underlying risk to unprotected domestic animals.**

## HOW TO KEEP YOUR LIVESTOCK SAFE

The best way to keep your livestock safe is to put them in a predator-proof-pen overnight from dusk till dawn.

A predator-proof-pen includes a fully enclosed and secure roof and no gaps bigger than 7” in diameter.

When building a predator-proof pen and deciding where to graze your animals in early mornings and late afternoons, consider the following (next page):

*This is just one example - there are lots of other ways to create an enclosure!*



Kate Remsen

## CONDUCT YOUR OWN RISK ASSESSMENT

Does your property include lots of thick vegetation or a creek that pumas may use as movement corridors? Do you frequently see deer? Do you live near open space?

## CREATE A VISUAL BARRIER

Pumas are visual predators so having a visual barrier (like shade cloth around the lower part of the pen) may reduce the chance of livestock being harassed or injured through the fence.

## AVOID THICK VEGETATION

Place the pen in an open area away from vegetation cover and wildlife corridors, like creeks.

## BE CONSISTENT!

That one time you forget to put your animals in their night pen may be the one time a puma happens to walk past.

## RECYCLE, REUSE, RE-PURPOSE

It is often possible to use existing infrastructure or materials to make a secure predator-proof pen.

*Want a free on-site consultation for how best to keep your animals safe?  
Contact Dr. Carolyn Whitesell: [cawhitesell@ucanr.edu](mailto:cawhitesell@ucanr.edu)*

*Santa Cruz Puma Project*

*UC Santa Cruz Puma Project uses GPS tracking collars and other techniques to study pumas in the Santa Cruz Mountains.*



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**UC Santa Cruz Puma Project:** [santacruzpumas.org](http://santacruzpumas.org)

**CA Department of Fish and Wildlife:** [wildlife.ca.gov](http://wildlife.ca.gov)

If a puma poses an imminent threat, **call 911**

**Wildlife Incident Reporting (WIR)** for non-emergency wildlife sightings or incidents: [apps.wildlife.ca.gov/wir](http://apps.wildlife.ca.gov/wir)

**UC Cooperative  
Extension**



## HISTORY AND LEGAL STATUS OF PUMAS IN CALIFORNIA

From 1907-1963, a bounty hunting program paid hunters to kill mountain lions in California. In 1990, California voters passed Proposition 117, which permanently banned the hunting of mountain lions and established them as a “specially protected mammal.” In 2020, the California Fish and Game Commission listed pumas in this region as a candidate species under the California Endangered Species Act.

*Adapted from “Coexisting with mountain lions”  
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UC Santa Cruz Puma Project

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