

Safety Note #78

FIELDWORK SAFETY: MOUNTAIN LIONS



Photograph Courtesy of Hopland REC

Mountain Lions occur throughout California foothill and mountainous regions and according to the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) about half of the state is prime mountain lion territory. The Fish and Game Code, Section 4800 (a) designates the mountain lion as a specially protected mammal and as such, it is unlawful to take, injure, possess, transport, import or sell any mountain lion or any part or product thereof, except as authorized by DFG.

Between 1991 and 2003 there were seven documented mountain lion attacks on humans in California. During the same time period, two Californians were killed by mountain lions. Most mountain lion attacks are on children.

During the late 1980s, DFG estimated 5,100 adult mountain lions were present in California.

The following fieldwork precautions and actions are recommended by DFG to prevent and repel mountain lion attacks:

- Avoid performing fieldwork that involves walking or hiking alone. Work with a partner in mountain lion country.
- Never approach or corner a mountain lion and always give the animal an escape route.
- Do not run from a mountain lion because you may stimulate their instinct to chase. Make eye contact and stand and face the animal.
- When conducting fieldwork in mountain lion country, avoid crouching down or bending over. These positions are similar to the four-legged forms of a mountain lion's prey.
- Upon encountering a mountain lion, attempt to appear larger than you are by raising your arms and opening your jacket. Throw stones, branches, or any other object within reach without crouching or turning your back. Wave your arms slowly and talk firmly in loud voice. Convince the mountain lion that you are a threat to it.
- If attacked, fight back by using whatever weapons you can grab. Try to remain standing and face the attacking animal.

Information Source: DFG at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/lion/>