

LIVING WITH LARGE PREDATORS IN NEW MEXICO



Large predators of New Mexico today are mountain lions, black bears, bobcats and coyotes. They are found throughout the state. These large, powerful predators have lived here for eons, feeding on the plentiful prey and playing an important role in the ecosystem.

You may live or recreate in habitats used by these predators. Large predators can at times be dangerous. However, with a better understanding of these magnificent and important animals, we can learn to coexist.

BLACK BEAR

Physical Characteristics

Large, powerful animals, black bears (*Ursus americanus*) weigh over 200 pounds. The largest recorded in New Mexico was 495 pounds. A “black” bear can be colored jet black to cinnamon, and there have been blonde-colored bears in the state. They have pointed noses and high-set ears. Claws are long, sharp and curved. Black bears can climb trees. Their lifespan in the wild can be long, and bears have been known to live 25 or 30 years in captivity.

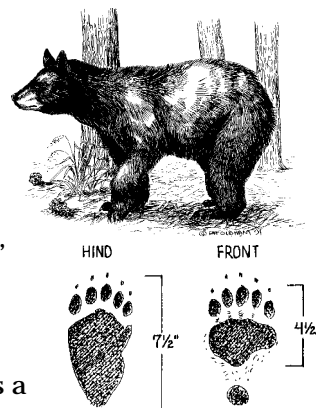
Adult female black bears normally give birth every other year to one to three cubs. The cubs, which weigh 8 oz. at birth, are born while the mother is in hibernation. The cubs remain with their mother during their first full winter, and disperse the following spring.

Hunting and Feeding Habits

Being omnivorous (feeding on both plants and animals) and opportunistic, the black bear has a diet which varies according to seasonal availability of foods. They eat spring grass, berries, acorns, pinon nuts, and dead animals. Occasionally bears will kill livestock. At times they break into commercial beehives and remove honey and the bees. Rocks and stumps may be overturned in search of grubs, insects or small rodents. Recent research indicates they may also be an efficient predator of large game.

Habitat

Most forested areas of New Mexico are populated by black bears, and it is not uncommon to find them around mountain campgrounds, and even near large population centers. They need woodland cover, as they are shy animals and difficult to locate in the wild. Mixed forest with food-producing trees such as oak or pinon, are good areas in which to find bears. Bears like water to play in and to drink. They frequently wallow in springs and creeks.



MOUNTAIN LION

Physical Characteristics

The lion's scientific name, (*Puma concolor*) means “cat of one color”. Mountain lions in New Mexico are usually tawny to light-cinnamon in color with black-tipped ears and tail. Adult cats can weigh from 80 to 150 pounds and measure eight feet long, with the tail included. The fur is short and kept clean by grooming. Mountain lions, even young cats, are easy to distinguish from other wild cats in New Mexico by their long tail.

Female lions generally reproduce when they are about two and a half years old, and give birth to an average of two to three young, called kittens. New born kittens are about a foot long and weigh about one pound. They normally live on the mother's milk for a month, after which they start eating meat she brings to them. The spotted kittens are cute when young, but quickly develop sharp claws and teeth that will serve them well when they grow up.

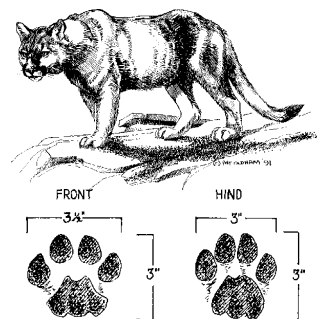
Hunting and Feeding Habits

Powerful muscles, sharp teeth, keen eyesight and hearing, and genetic makeup give mountain lions the need and the ability to kill prey for food. Most active from dusk to dawn, lions will also travel and hunt in daylight. Lions prefer to eat deer; however, they also kill elk, porcupines, small mammals, livestock and a variety of domestic animals, even pets. It has been estimated that an adult lion can survive well on one deer per week.

Mountain lions prefer to kill their own prey. Like most cats, they take their prey by ambush rather than by a long pursuit. Lions usually kill with a powerful bite below the base of the skull, breaking the neck. The unconsumed portions are covered with dirt, leaves or snow and the lion may return to feed on it over the course of a few days. Lions feeding on a kill can be extremely dangerous to people.

Habitat

Historically the mountain lion has occupied all parts of the state except the open, eastern plains. Lions are found in areas of pinon pine, juniper, mountain mahogany, ponderosa pine, oak brush and subalpine meadows. Areas with plentiful populations of deer are likely to have abundant populations of mountain lions. Individual lions range in areas varying in size from 10 to over 300 square miles. Females with young kittens use the smallest areas, adult males occupy the largest areas. Size of the home range depends on the terrain and how much food is available.



COYOTE

Physical Characteristics

More frequently heard than seen, the coyote's howl is a familiar sound in New Mexico. The coyote (*Canis latrans*) is a wiry, nimble wild dog, built and colored for escaping large enemies as well as stalking nervous prey. A coyote weighing more than 50 pounds is a rarity, the norm being between 25-30 pounds. A mature animal is just two feet high at the shoulder and three feet long, or a foot or so longer when his bushy tail floats out behind while running.

Coyotes are monogamous and a pairing may last for several years, though not necessarily for the life of the coyote. Female coyotes come into heat once a year, usually in the late winter or early spring. An average of six pups are born approximately 63 days later in a burrow constructed by the adults. The young begin to emerge from the den at about two weeks of age, and disperse after six to nine months. Occasionally, some young may remain with the parents, and for a time a small group is formed.



Hunting and Feeding Habits

Although about 90 percent of the coyote's diet is other mammals, they are opportunistic and depending upon season and availability, consume a wide variety of plant and animal material.

When rabbits are in good supply, they are the dietary mainstay. Carrion (dead animals), mice, rats, ground squirrels, marmots, prairie dogs, and other rodents, together with a few birds, make up the remainder of the basic diet.

Coyotes are less social than wolves or domestic dogs; thus they often hunt alone, or a mated pair may cooperate in foraging. A coyote cannot outrun a jack rabbit or a pronghorn fawn that is more than a couple of weeks old, but two coyotes will often pair to kill difficult prey. They run in relays to tire an animal, or one of them waits in ambush while the other drives the victim toward the other.

Habitat

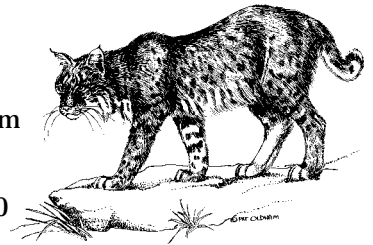
The coyote is widely distributed in New Mexico, and may be seen in almost every life zone and habitat from alpine meadows down to the desert. Despite control programs aimed at reducing their numbers, they are relatively common, due in part to their ability to adapt to changing environments. No other carnivore has increased its range despite the expansion of human activity.

BOBCAT

Physical Characteristics

Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are cat-like in appearance, with a short tail and sharp, erect ears. Their stubby tails and bobbing motion identify them in the wild, as do their grey and yellow markings. The coat tends to be spotted on the flanks and striped on the face and legs. A bobcat, even when fully grown, may weigh only 15 to 30 pounds. The bobcat is shy and seldom seen, however, it is a savage fighter when cornered or taking prey.

Bobcats can mate at any time of the year, normally from February to May, and give birth to a litter of one to seven kittens 60 days later. The young don't open their eyes for at least 10 days. Kittens are weaned at two months of age, and they may remain with the female until the fall of the next year.



Hunting and Feeding Habits

Like other cats, bobcats hunt primarily at night, but may also hunt during the day. The bobcat's eyes are admirably adapted to night-hunting. Its pupil which is small and elliptical in bright light becomes large and round in dim light and aids in gathering light. Bobcats are considered to be sight hunters using their eyes to full advantage.

Bobcats, like most other cats, hunt by stealth rather than pursuit. The cat may sit by a game trail or other strategic site until a rabbit passes nearby, and then capture the animal with a pounce or a quick rush. Their diet consists of small and medium-sized vertebrates. Rabbits are favored when common, and rodents, birds, and sometimes reptiles or even insects are taken. Small pets, such as house-cats and small dogs, have fallen prey to these aggressive predators.









Habitat

The bobcat is found throughout New Mexico and is established in every county in the state regardless of terrain. It is found in the river bottoms, the alpine zone of the high mountains, and in the sandy desert areas. It even survives in heavily populated areas. Bobcats are great wanderers, but unlike the far-ranging mountain lion, the bobcat seldom travels more than two miles from its home. Unlike the lion, the bobcat is adapted to settled areas. Even a wooded lot in an agricultural area can sustain at least a pair of bobcats.

When People Encounter Large Predators

Generally, large predators are elusive. They tend to live in remote, rural country. Such conditions exist in mountain subdivisions, urban fringes and open spaces. Consequently, the number of predator/human interactions is increasing. This increase is due to a variety of reasons: more people moving into their habitat, an increase in prey species, drought conditions requiring them to expand their home range, more people using hiking and biking trails in their habitat and a greater awareness of the presence of large predators.

What to Do if You Live in Large Predator Country

-  If you choose to live in or have a summer home in large predator country, make sure that you don't contribute to their becoming a problem. To reduce the risk we urge you to follow these simple precautions.
-  Closely supervise children whenever they play outdoors. Make sure children are home before dusk and are not outside before dawn. These are the times that large predators are most active.
-  Structure landscapes so that it eliminates hiding cover for predators. You do not have to remove all vegetation but enough so you can detect a predator if it comes into your yard. Make it difficult for them to approach unseen.
-  Install outside lighting, preferably with motion sensors. Light areas where you walk so you can see a large predator.
-  Close off open spaces below porches and decks.
-  Planting non-native shrubs and plants often will encourage prey species to come onto your property. Predators follow prey.
-  Roaming pets are easy prey. Bring them in at night. If they must stay out, confine them to a kennel with a secure roof. Do not feed pets outside where they or their food can attract predators or other small mammals like raccoons which predators prey upon.
-  Store all garbage securely. Most predators with residential areas within their habitat do not cause any damage. If a predator doesn't find abundant food, it will move on.

What to Do if You Meet a Large Predator

There are no definite rules about what to do if you meet a large predator. In most cases, the animal will detect you first and will leave the area. Attacks are rare compared to the number of encounters. However, if you do encounter one, here are some suggestions. Remember: Every situation is different with respect to the animal, the terrain, and the person.

STAY CALM

If you see a predator that hasn't seen you, calmly leave the area. As you move away, talk out loud to let the animal know of your presence.

STOP

Back away slowly while facing the predator if you can do so safely. Avoid direct eye contact. Don't run as this might stimulate its instinct to chase and attack. Give it plenty of room to escape.

DO ALL YOU CAN TO APPEAR LARGER

Raise your arms and open your jacket if you are wearing one. If you have small children with you, protect them by picking them up so they don't panic and run.

NEVER APPROACH

Wild animals are unpredictable, however, they will usually avoid a confrontation unless pushed into one.

WATCH FOR YOUNG

Coming between a female and her young can be dangerous. If a young animal is nearby, try to move away from it, being alert for others that might be around.

CONVINCE IT YOU'RE NOT PREY

If the animal approaches closer or behaves aggressively, arm yourself with a large stick, throw rocks or sticks at it, speak louder and more firmly to it. Convince the predator that you are dominant and a danger to it.

FIGHT BACK

If a predator does attack, fight back aggressively. Use any possible objects such as rocks, sticks, backpacks, caps, jackets or even your bare hands.

Who Can You Call?

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish is responsible for managing, conserving and protecting wildlife within the state. Your concerns about wildlife are our concerns as well.

If you have a potentially life-threatening situation with a large predator, or if an injury occurs, please contact the Department of Game and Fish, Monday through Friday, 8a.m. to 5 p.m., at the phone numbers listed below. After hours, contact the New Mexico State Police or your local Sheriff's Department. Sightings or encounters with large predators are not that uncommon and you are not required to report them.

Main Office

1 Wildlife Way
Santa Fe, NM 87507
(505) 476-8000

Northwest Area Office

3841 Midway Place NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109
(505) 222-4700

Southwest Area Office

2715 Northrise Drive
Las Cruces, NM 88011
(505) 532-2100

Northeast Area Office

215 York Canyon Road
Raton, NM 87740
(505) 445-2311

Southeast Area Office

1912 W. Second St.
Roswell, NM 88201
(505) 624-6135

Please visit our web site at:

www.wildlife.state.nm.us

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