



WILDLIFE AWARE

# COUGARS

- Cougar sightings and encounters are rare, however, as human populations increase in rural areas, cougars are increasingly coming in contact with domestic livestock, pets and people.
- Increased recreational activity has also caused an increase in human encounters with cougars.
- It is important to note that a cougar will normally sense you and leave an area before you realize it is nearby.
- Prevention is the most effective way to minimize cougar encounters.

# HIKING AND WORKING IN COUGAR COUNTRY

- If possible, never travel alone in the backcountry; keep your group together at all times.
- Keep children close at hand.
- Check with your local Parks Board about wildlife sightings before your trip.
- Be aware of your surroundings; learn to recognize signs of cougar activity, such as tracks, scat and markings.
- Avoid areas where carcasses have been left; be aware that cougars often cover their kills with forest debris
- Carry a walking stick and pepper spray (Make sure you know how to properly use pepper spray)
- Make noise to alert cougars of your presence.
- It is best to leave your pet at home, however, if you do travel with a pet, keep it on a leash at all times.
- If you come across cougar kittens, leave them alone and immediately leave the area; a mother cougar will aggressively defend her young.

# LIVING IN COUGAR COUNTRY

- Do not attract wildlife into your yard; especially major prey species such as deer.
- When children are outdoors, encourage them to play in supervised groups, away from dense vegetation; make sure they come inside before dusk; make sure children are accompanied by an adult on early morning trips to the school's bus stop, especially if there have been cougar sightings in the area.
- Feed pets indoors, never leave pet food outside.
- At night, keep pets inside in a secure, covered kennel; roaming pets are easy prey for cougars and other predators.
- Walk your pets during the day, avoiding natural wildlife corridors along waters waterways and through wooded areas.
- Make sure that livestock feed is stored in sturdy sealed structures.

# COUGAR ENCOUNTERS

- Never approach a cougar; although they will normally avoid confrontation, they are unpredictable.
- Always leave room for a cougar to easily escape.
- Immediately pick up your children; children frighten easily and may run, triggering an attack
- Don't turn your back on a cougar, face the cougar and slowly back away
- Don't run or play dead; try to back away slowly (running or any sudden movement may trigger an attack).
- Stay calm, talk to the cougar in a strong, firm voice.
- Make yourself appear as large as possible by holding your arms or an object above your head.

# AGRESSIVE COUGAR



- Try to appear as if you are the predator rather than the prey; actions such as shouting, waving a stick or throwing rocks may help prevent an attack.
- If a cougar does attack, fight back! People have survived by using their bare fists, sticks, fishing rods, rocks and other items to fend off a cougar attack.

# PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

- The species name, *Felis concolor*, literally means one colour; however, cougars can be several different shades of golden/yellowish brown, depending on where they live.
- Male cougars can reach weights of between 65 and 90 kilograms. Females weigh between 40 and 60 kilograms.
- Because their hind legs are longer than their forelegs, cougars have great leaping power; their tails, which are up to 150 centimetres, are used for balance.
- Cougars are relatively fast and can even outrun deer for short distances.
- Cougar tracks have classic feline attributes: they are asymmetrical; they have a curved ridge between heel and toe pads; heel pads are larger than toe pads; the front paw is always larger than the hind paw; and each toe has a retractable claw (for this reason, claws are never seen on cougar tracks).
- Their vision is well adapted for hunting; cougars possess a total vision field of 287 degrees and are well equipped to detect movement of prey: for night vision, cougars have an extra large pupil to gather light and a special layer that reflects light back through the visual cells of the eye; this adaption requires extra protection for the eye during the daylight hours, so the pupils contract to a vertical slit or “cat’s eye” during the day.

# HABITS AND BEHAVIOR

- Cougars are crepuscular by nature (most active at sunrise and sunset), but they will hunt at any time of the day or night.
- Cougars locate their dens on ledges, in tree hollows on steep slopes, under fallen logs, and in between rocks; they keep their dens free of bones and other litter.
- Cougars have ranges up to 300 square kilometres; they may roam up to 80 kilometres in a single day.
- Cougars mark their territory along trails, under trees and on cliff edges and ridges by using mounds of scrapped and scratched earth, pine needles and other forest litter soaked with urine and scat.
- Cougars can mate any time of the year but normally mate between March and June; three months after mating, a litter of two to four kittens is born; kittens weigh as little as 350 grams at birth and are born blind. Kittens are nursed for three months then introduced to meat; they stay with their mothers for up to two years.

# HUNTING

- Cougars are efficient predators. Although their primary food source is deer, as opportunists cougars will also hunt elk, moose, sheep, porcupine, beaver, hares, grouse and occasionally, livestock.
- Cougars usually remove weaker prey individuals, but also will hunt healthy animals if the opportunity arises.
- People often mistakenly believe that the cougars ambush their prey by leaping from trees, however, that is not the case – cougars normally hunt by slinking close to the ground in a stalking stance to within 10 metres of their prey; once close enough, cougars typically pounce on their prey from the side, dig their claws into the shoulders, neck and flank, then bite into the neck or throat with their scissor like canines, severing the spinal cord.
- The kill is dragged to a densely sheltered area, where the cougar gorges on the meat; after feeding, kills are usually covered with leaves and other material.
- Cougar kills can be distinguished from those of wolves and coyotes both by method of attack and feeding characteristics: cougars prefer to start on the liver, heart and lungs in the abdominal cavity, while wolves and coyotes feed on the tail end first.

# BEARS



# HIKING AND WORKING IN BEAR COUNTRY

- Never feed or approach bears or other wildlife
- Reduce or eliminate odours that attract bears.
- Bear caches must be used if they are available.
- Pack out all your garbage. Store garbage with your food, out of reach of bears. Do not bury garbage or throw it into pit toilets. Only paper and wood may be burned; plastics, tinfoils and food items do not burn completely and the remains will attract bears.
- Always keep children nearby and insight; travel in groups, staying together at all times.
- Carry pepper spray and consider taking a walking stick and hunting knife.
- Let bears know you are present by making noises such as: talking, singing or wearing a bell.
- Avoid areas where carcasses have been left.
- It is best to leave your pet at home, however, if you do travel with a pet, keep it on a leash at all times.
- Watch for bear signs: tracks, droppings, overturned rocks, rotten trees torn apart, clawed, bitten or rubbed trees, bear trails, fresh diggings or trampled vegetation.

# PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

- Common coat colour is black although it can be brown, cinnamon, blond or combinations of these colours.
- Black bears are intelligent, powerful but shy and avoid human contact.
- There are strong swimmers and climbers and when running can reach speeds of 50 kms per hour.
- Bears are always in search of food, motivated by sights, sounds, memories and in particular, odours. When bears find an easy source of food at a residence or campsite, they begin to associate this food source with people and dwellings.
- When bears discover that humans can be intimidated, they can get bold in acquiring this food.

# BEAR ENCOUNTERS

- Stop, remain calm, assess the situation.
- Do not turn and run as this may prompt a chase response.
- Do not climb a tree or enter water, as these options will not guarantee your safety.
- If a bear is unaware of you, leave the area calmly and quietly when the bear is not looking in your direction.
- If you decide to take a detour, choose a wide path that will not intersect the bear if it is moving.
- If the bear becomes aware of you, calmly identify yourself as a human by talking to it in a low voice while waving your arms slowly as you back away to increase your distance.
- Avoid direct eye contact
- If the bear seems unconcerned, leave the area calmly and quietly.

# UNAPPROACHING BEAR



- If spotted in the distance, do not approach the bear. Make a wide detour or leave the area immediately.
- If you are in close range, do not approach the bear. Remain calm, keep it in view. Avoid direct eye contact and move away without running.

# AN APPROACHING BEAR

- If the bear is standing up it is usually trying to identify you. Talk softly so it knows what you are. If it is snapping its jaws, lowering its head, flattening its ears, growling or making 'woofing' signs, it is displaying its aggression.
- Do not run unless you are very close to a secure place. Move away, keeping the bear in view. Avoid direct eye contact. Dropping your pack or an object may distract the bear to give you more time to flee. If it is a grizzly, consider climbing a tree.

# ATTACKING BEAR

- Your response depends on the species and where the bear is being defensive or offensive.
- Bears sometimes bluff their way of confrontation by charging then turning away at the last moment. Generally, the response is to do nothing or to threaten or further arouse the bear.
- While fighting back usually increases the intensity of an attack, it may cause the bear to leave.
- Each incident is unique.

# A STALKING BEAR

- A stalking bear's approach will be deliberate and silent. This is the bear type you should be most concerned with. The head will be up and ears erect, displaying no signs of stress. This behaviour is associated with offensive behaviour.
- If the bear continues to follow you:
  - Stop and stand your ground.
  - Make direct eye contact.
  - Act aggressively to persuade the bear that you are not easy prey.
  - Shout and wave your arms, stomp your feet, elevate yourself onto a log or rock and raise your jacket to look bigger.
  - If in range, use pepper spray.
- If the stalking bear attacks you:
  - Fight back with anything at hand. Use your walking stick, knife, firearm, rocks, sticks, car keys or even bare hands.
    - Strike for the bear's eyes and nose.
    - Kick and yell.
    - Be relentless, you are fighting for your life.

# DEFENSIVE ATTACKS

## GRIZZLY:

- Do nothing to threaten or further arouse the bear.
- Play dead. Assume the 'cannonball' position with hands clasped behind the neck and face buried in knees.
- Do not move until the bear leaves the area. Such attacks seldom last beyond a few minutes.

## BLACK BEAR:

- Playing dead is not appropriate.
- Try to retreat from the attack.

# OFFENSIVE ATTACKS

## GRIZZLY OR BLACK BEAR:

- Do not play dead.
- Try to escape to a secure place (car or building) or climb a tree unless it is a black bear.
- If you have no other option, try to intimidate the bear with deterrents or weapons such as tree branches and rocks.
- If the bear is attacking for your food, abandon the food and leave the area.

