

## Mountain Lions

Mountain lions are tan cats with many names. The English language has over 40 names, and Spanish and Indian dialects have about 60. They have names such as panther, painter, mountain lion, cougar, puma, catamount, etc. In Mexico, it's called leon, leopardo, or puma. Although there are many common names, there's only one scientific name for this fascinating creature: *Puma concolor*.

Mountain lion kittens are born with their eyes closed. Unlike adults, kittens have spotted fur coats and short, ringed tails. At birth, kittens weigh about one pound (0.45 kilograms). Mountain lions are in the small cat family, along with the bobcat, lynx, ocelot, and even the familiar house cat. In fact, mountain lions can't roar. However, this doesn't keep it from being a hunter one bit.

Its body is strong, lean, and well muscled with sturdy limbs. Mountain lions are sprinters. They have long legs, they walk on their toes, and have a flexible spine. This also helps its ability to leap great distances. This hunter is skillful when it comes to killing porcupines. They flip them over, avoiding the quills, so they can get to their unprotected bellies. However, some mountain lions that are inexperienced suffer from quills in their paws or head. Ouch! Their eyes are designed for day and night vision. They can hunt in sunshine, or moonlight. In North America, male mountain lions can weigh 120 to 165 pounds, while females weigh up to 80 and 100 pounds. One especially large mountain lion topped the scales with a weight of 300 pounds!

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### Additional notes from Mrs. Gingg:

Mountain lions are frequently captured by wildlife cameras deployed in the Learning Among the Oaks nature trail area. What factors make this an excellent habitat for mountain lions? Hint: What prey species are common in this area? Where do mountain lions find shelter (and places to raise young)?

What should you know about staying safe when visiting mountain lion country? Stay together, don't roam alone and keep children close to adults. Be alert. Scan a tree canopy before you hike under it. If you see a mountain lion, three important things to remember:

- Don't run! You'll look like prey.
- Make yourself big. Raise your arms.
- Make a lot of noise.

