

# Wildlife Express!

Volume 27/Issue 1

Mountain Lion

September 2013



## Mountain Lion



Photo courtesy Kenney Jeffries

# Mountain Lions

**M**ountain lions are true American natives. They have roamed more areas in the Americas than any other mammal. Only humans have lived in more places. They once were found from Canada in North America all the way down to Chile in South America. They were found from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast.

Mountain lions still live over most of South America. In North America, they are mainly found in the west. In the east, mountain lions are only found in Florida. They are found throughout Idaho.

Mountain lions are the largest wild cat in Idaho. Males can be five and one-half feet to nine feet long and weigh 80 to 265 pounds. Females are smaller; they are five to seven and one-half feet long and weigh 64 to 140 pounds. Mountain lion colors range from a tannish-reddish color to a grayish color. One thing that sets the mountain lion apart from other wild cats in Idaho is the long tail. It is 20 to 32 inches long. Lynx and bobcats both have much shorter tails.

Mountain lions are carnivores. They like to eat meat. In Idaho, mountain lions eat a lot of mule deer. They will also eat smaller animals, like ground squirrels and rabbits. To kill prey, mountain lions stalk the animal. Then they jump onto the animal's back and break the neck with a quick bite. When mountain lions kill a large animal, they bury the leftovers under leaves and twigs. This is called caching. A mule deer will feed a mountain lion for many days.

Mountain lions usually live alone, unless a mother has young. Baby mountain lions are

called cubs or kittens. A mountain lion may have one to six cubs, but two to three are more common. Cubs weigh about 14 ounces when born. That is less than one pound! Newborn cubs are helpless; they are blind and deaf. Ten days after being born the cubs' eyes open, their ears unfold, and their first teeth erupt. This is also when the cubs start to crawl and explore the sheltered area where their mother gave birth. The cubs drink their mother's milk for two or three months before they are fully weaned. For about the next year, cubs stay with their mother learning to hunt. Most cubs are on their own by the time they are 15 months old.

Mountain lions are one of Idaho's top predators. If a mountain lion can avoid other mountain lions and accidents, it may live 10 years in the wild. In captivity, mountain lions have been known to live for 20 years.



Photo Courtesy Eric Crawford

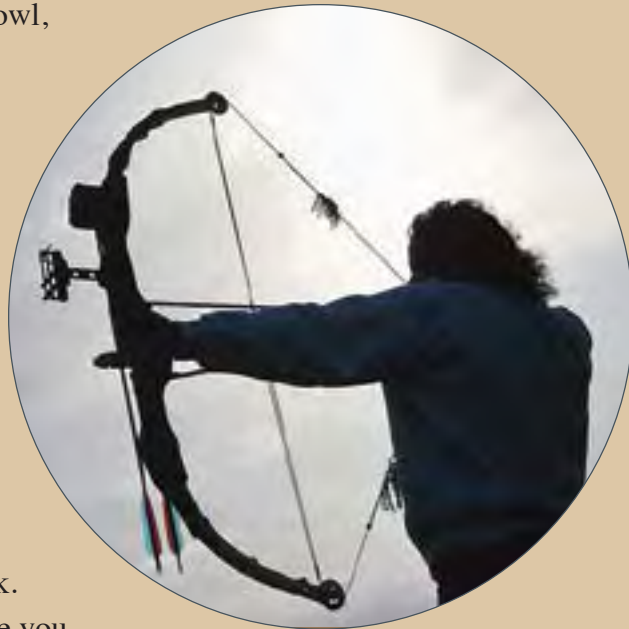
# Be Outside: Hunting

**I**t is September which means that fall is almost here. Fall is hunting season in Idaho. Hunters head into the field to harvest a number of game animals including deer, elk, waterfowl, and upland game birds like chukar and grouse. Most hunters will tell you that they enjoy hunting because it gets them outside in beautiful country. They also enjoy seeing many kinds of wildlife and spending time with family and friends. If hunters are lucky enough to harvest an animal, they also enjoy the added benefit of a freezer full of meat.

If you are 10 to 11 years old, you can hunt for upland birds and turkeys. Once you turn 12, you can also hunt for big game like deer and elk. You need to take a hunter education class before you can get your hunting license. Hunter education will teach you how to be a safe and responsible hunter.

Even if you are not ready to hunt, you can go on hunting trips with your parents, other family members or family friends. This is a great way to learn about hunting. You can help spot animals, carry equipment, and help with field dressing an animal that someone has harvested. Going out with other hunters will help you learn a lot about hunting. You will also learn a lot about wildlife. Tracking deer and elk can teach you a lot about their habitat, where they go, what they eat, and what they do. Trying to find grouse in a forest will give you a whole new look at the importance of camouflage. And all your observation skills will be put to the test as you look for game animals. All these things will help you be a better hunter when it is your turn to head into the field.

If you go hunting, make sure to wear warm clothing that you can layer if the temperature drops. Leave your tennis shoes at home and wear good boots to protect your feet. You should also wear a hunter orange hat and vest so you are visible to other nearby hunters. Bring binoculars to observe wildlife and a camera to take pictures of what you see. Going hunting will give you the chance to be outside in some of Idaho's beautiful wild places.



**BE OUTSIDE**  
IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

# Wild Cats

**D**o you have a pet cat at home? Cats have been companions to people for a long time. Ancient Egyptians worshipped cats. Farmers have traditionally kept cats to protect grain from mice. Cats appear in many of our favorite stories or cartoons like The Cat in the Hat and Garfield. Cats have been a part of our lives for so long that we forget our pets were domesticated from small, wild cats.

Worldwide there are 35 species of wild cats. Idaho has three living in our state – the mountain lion, lynx and bobcat.



All cats, even a pet tabby, are made to hunt. They have special adaptations that make them some of the best hunters around. Cats rely on a combination of vision, hearing and smell to find their prey. Most cats hunt at night. They have large eyes and sharp vision. During the day, cats can see as well as humans; but at night, their vision is six times more sensitive! Cats have a special membrane in their eye that catches light. The glow you see when light hits a cat's eye at night is this membrane reflecting the light around the cat's eye. Smaller cats can hear high-pitched sounds humans cannot. Their ears help them locate rodents and insects that use these high-pitched sounds to communicate.

Once a cat has located its prey, it sneaks up on the prey. The cat crouches low to the ground and quickly moves toward the prey, then freezes. It waits for the best time then pounces. Cats have long canine teeth that are made to cut the prey's spinal cord or windpipe. The cat's short muzzle allows it to breathe while biting and subduing its prey. The hunt is over quickly when the cat gets a good hold.

Have you ever heard the saying, "A cat always lands on its feet."?

Cats have an amazing sense of balance. They can climb trees and leap and twist through the air. They have special structures in their inner ears that help them balance and sense which way is up. When a cat is bending through the air, the inner ear guides the head and neck into a horizontal position. The rest of the body follows the head and neck, and soon the cat is standing on its feet.

If you or a friend has a cat, watch it around the house. Dangle a string in front of the cat or throw a toy mouse by it. You may see some wild hunting skills shine through your pet.



# Animal Hide & Seek

**S**ometimes sticks walk, leaves hop and rocks slither. Of course, these things really can't hop or crawl, but sometimes it sure looks like they're moving. Often when we are seeing a rock slither or crawl, it's actually an animal.

Camouflage (KAM-e-flazh) means to blend in with your surroundings and hide. It is a type of disguise. Camouflage may be a certain color, pattern of colors, or a special shape that fools the eye. Camouflage may help an animal to hide, help a hunter to sneak up on its prey, or both.

Many animals, like the snowshoe hare, change their colors with the seasons.

Animals that change color to match their background are using cryptic (KRIP-tik) coloration. When snow starts to fall, their coats gradually turn white to match. Then in the spring, the snowshoe

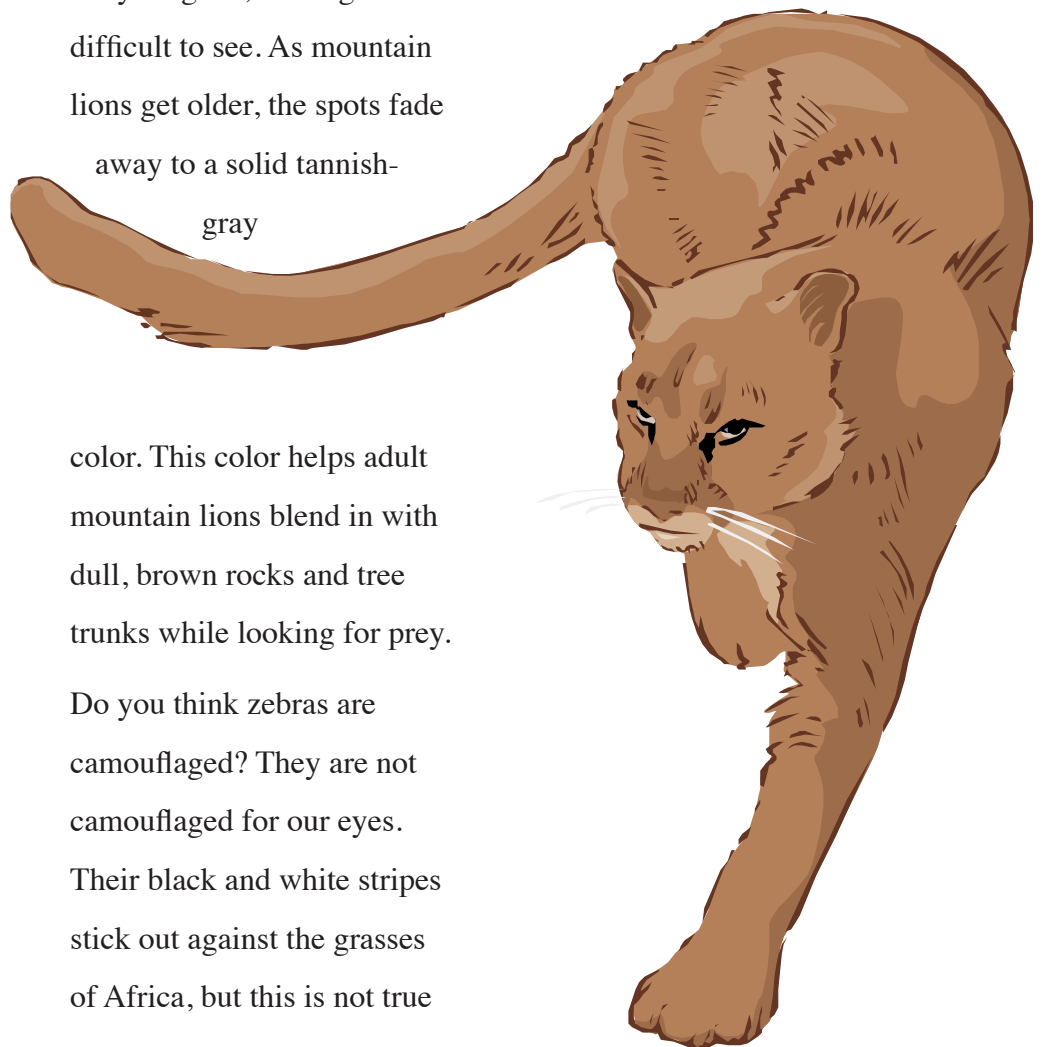
hare's white fur will fall out and be replaced with a brown colored fur. No matter what the season happens to be, the snowshoe hare has a coat that helps it to hide from predators.

Animals may even change colors and patterns throughout their lives. Mountain lions are born with tan coats covered in dark colored spots. The spots help to break up the outline of the young cat, making it more difficult to see. As mountain lions get older, the spots fade away to a solid tannish-gray

color. This color helps adult mountain lions blend in with dull, brown rocks and tree trunks while looking for prey.

Do you think zebras are camouflaged? They are not camouflaged for our eyes. Their black and white stripes stick out against the grasses of Africa, but this is not true

for lions' eyes. Lions have a difficult time seeing some colors. Grasses and trees look like shades of gray, so the zebras' stripes help them to blend into the tall grasses. This helps the zebras avoid becoming a lion's meal. Whether hunter or hunted, camouflage helps animals to survive.



# Hunt . . . or be Hunted

**W**hen you hear the word “predator,” do you think of a large, snarling animal with long claws? The word predator may bring images to your mind of huge teeth dripping with saliva and frightful feelings. Are these images and negative feelings really accurate?



A predator is any animal that kills and eats another animal to survive. This can mean an animal as tiny as a spider or as large as a whale. Predators come in many different sizes and shapes. Mountain lions are predators. Trout, dragonflies and robins are predators, too. If an animal eats another animal, then it’s a predator.

Being a predator is not as easy as it sounds. Animals that are hunted and eaten by other animals are called prey. Prey animals do not want to be a predator’s meal. They have ways to avoid being caught. Prey often have large ears to hear predators sneaking up on them. Many prey can explode away from a predator with great speed. Some even look like rocks or trees. Camouflage is a great way to avoid being eaten by a predator. Predators have to overcome all of a prey animal’s tricks to catch the animal. While predators are chasing their dinner, the prey might try to kick, bite, or sting them. Nine times out of ten, the predator will not catch its prey. The predator will go hungry. Life as a predator is not easy!

Predators are important parts of the ecosystem. They help maintain the balance of nature. Could you imagine how many mice there would be if we didn’t have red foxes or hawks to eat them? We might be overrun with mice and other pests eating our crops. Often predators eat sick and unhealthy animals. Removing unhealthy members from a herd helps to keep the whole herd healthy and strong.

Predators may sometimes be seen as vicious or bloodthirsty, but is this accurate? Predators kill for one reason – to survive. Our world would be a different place with no predators.

# Look . . .

## A Mountain Lion!

**I**t is a rare treat to see a mountain lion in the wild. They are usually secretive, shy, and quiet. They also blend into their surroundings very well. It can be difficult to see them against a tree or dry hillside.

Mountain lions sometimes follow prey into towns, especially during the fall and winter. Young lions that have moved out of their mothers' territory are sometimes forced into towns by larger, older mountain lions.

Although they are generally shy, mountain lions may pose a danger to humans or pets. They are still large, wild animals that deserve our respect. If you happen to run into a mountain lion, here are some things to remember when you encounter this wild creature:

- Do not run. Running may trigger the animal's instinct to chase. Move slowly and try to back away.
- Look the mountain lion in the eye and do not turn your back to the lion.
- Stand tall and look big. Open your jacket and raise your arms over your head. Do not bend down as mountain lions are more likely to go after shorter prey.
- Yell in a loud, firm voice. Tell the mountain lion to "Go Away!"
- Stand by an adult to so you look larger.
- Never approach a mountain lion. Give the lion a way out of a close situation.
- If a lion behaves aggressively, arm yourself with a large stick or rock, and face the lion. In the rare case that a mountain lion attacks, remain standing, fight back, and hit the lion with your stick.
- Pepper spray used for bear attacks will also deter mountain lions.



# Mountain Lion Word Search

<b>BALANCE</b>	<b>CROUCH</b>	<b>LARGE</b>	<b>PUMA</b>
<b>CACHING</b>	<b>CUB</b>	<b>NATIVE</b>	<b>SOLITARY</b>
<b>CAT</b>	<b>DEER</b>	<b>PAINTER</b>	<b>STALK</b>
<b>CATAMOUNT</b>	<b>EYESIGHT</b>	<b>PANTHER</b>	<b>TAIL</b>
<b>COUGAR</b>	<b>JUMP</b>	<b>PREDATOR</b>	<b>WILD</b>

C N C Y O C R E K W O P A Z M  
L A R O U L Y E P A I N T E R  
U T T B G E F C C R Q M T E P  
P I X A S Q R U T N T A C I R  
U V Y I M O C H O A A Z R M E  
M E G J U O Y R A T I L O S D  
A H G C W N U T K N H R A P A  
T G H R Q S K N G C E V R B T  
B N K L A T S Y T H O E E V O  
B I F W L L J Y T U E U N O R  
J H S J S Z V N K D S B G U A  
J C J V P T A E Q P Q B L A P  
E A W U M P W I L D E J I T R  
Q C J U M S I W W V K S A G H  
G U Q N S P D O D A B S T K J

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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