

Wildlife Express

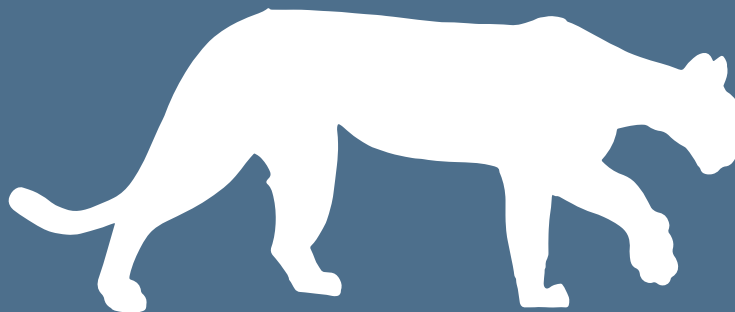
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MOUNTAIN LION

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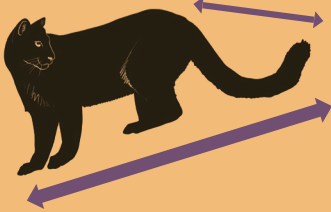
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MOUNTAIN LION

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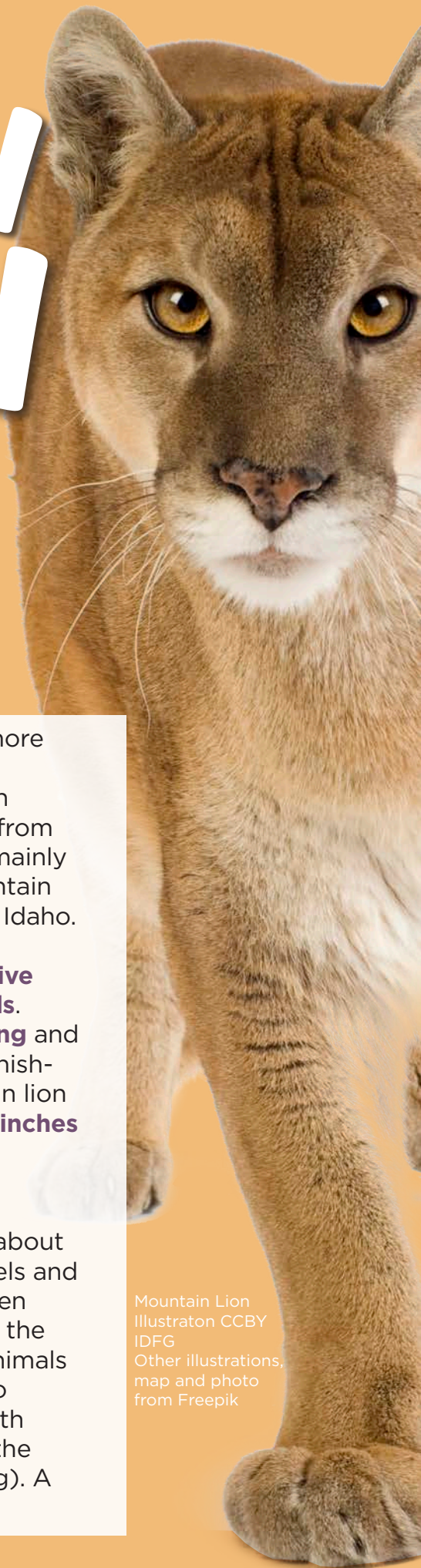


Mountain lions are true American natives. They have roamed more areas in the Americas than any other mammal. Only humans have lived in more places. They once were found from Canada in North America all the way down to Chile in South America and from the Pacific coast to the Atlantic coast. Now mountain lions are mainly found in the western part of the United States. In the east, mountain lions are found in Florida. You can find mountain lions all across 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' favorite food is mule deer, but they will eat just about anything they can catch. Elk, smaller animals, like ground squirrels and rabbits and even birds are on their menu. Mountain lions will often stalk their prey. To kill a deer, they sometimes try and get above the animal by climbing a tree or getting up on some rocks. When animals walk under where the mountain lions are hiding, they spring into action. They jump onto the animals' 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** (cash-ing). A mule deer will feed a mountain lion for many days.

Mountain Lion
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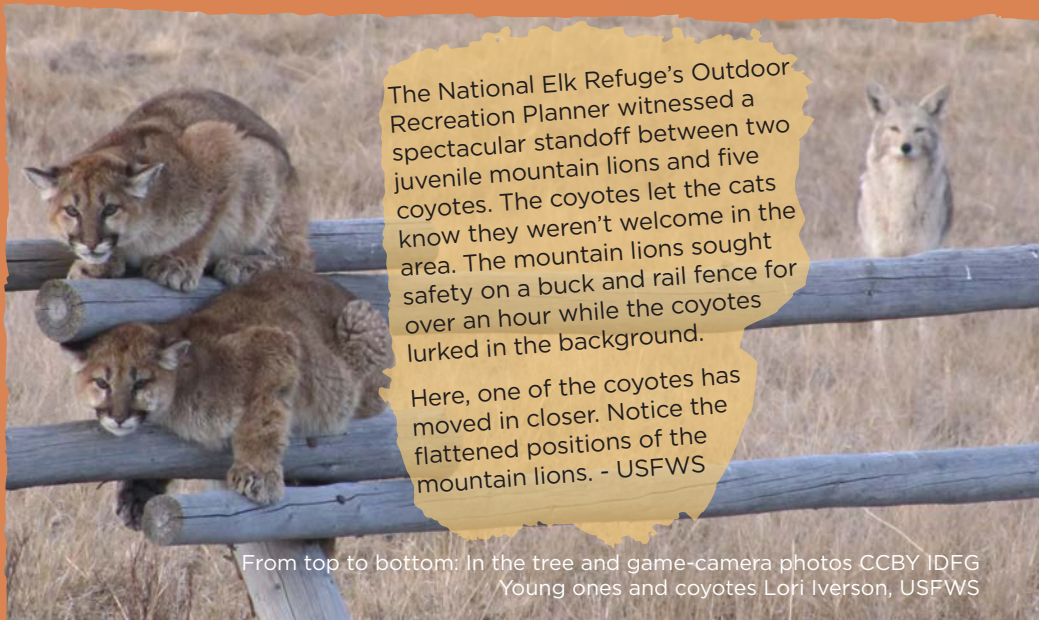
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Mountain lions usually live alone, unless a mother has young.

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, they may live 10 years in the wild. In captivity, mountain lions have been known to live for 20 years.



The National Elk Refuge's Outdoor Recreation Planner witnessed a spectacular standoff between two juvenile mountain lions and five coyotes. The coyotes let the cats know they weren't welcome in the area. The mountain lions sought safety on a buck and rail fence for over an hour while the coyotes lurked in the background.

Here, one of the coyotes has moved in closer. Notice the flattened positions of the mountain lions. - USFWS

Wild Cats



Do 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, Canada lynx and bobcat.

All cats, even a pet tabby, are made to hunt. This is one reason why pet cats should be kept indoors. They can have a serious affect on wildlife.

Cats 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 a special structure in their inner ears that helps 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.





What to Call Them?

puma
panther
painter
catamount

Have you ever heard of scientific names?

They are usually long, made up of two words, and sometimes hard to pronounce. You may have wondered why people use scientific names. People use scientific names, so they know they are talking about the same animal. Here is an example.

In Idaho, we have large wild cats with long tails. They live in many habitats, and their favorite food happens to be deer. They are this month's featured animal, mountain lions. You may have heard them called **cougars, pumas, panthers, painters or catamounts.** That's six different names for the same animal! Wow, that can be confusing.

The names listed above are the common names for the mountain lion. Often the name used depends on where a person

lives. In Florida, people call mountain lions panthers. In the southwestern part of the United States, people are likely to call them pumas.

What if you wanted to share information about mountain lions with another person?

It may be difficult if that person called them pumas or painters. What if you spoke a different language? This could really make things challenging. How do you make sure you are talking about the same animal?

Scientific names are the answer. They are the same everywhere in the world. By using a scientific name, people know they are talking about the same animal. That way they won't get confused by common names. The scientific name for the mountain lion is *Puma concolor*.

Mammal in the Jackrabbit (Lepus) Genus.
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Craniata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Lagomorpha
Family: Leporidae
Genus: Lepus
Species: *Lepus townsendii*

The first part of a scientific name tells us what genus an animal is in. Animals with the same genus name are closely related. The second part of the scientific name is the species name. It tells us something specific about the animal. Sometimes animals are named after people. The white-tailed jackrabbit's scientific name is *Lepus townsendii*. It was named after John Kirk Townsend. He was a naturalist from the 1800s, and one of the first people that collected white-tailed jackrabbits for science.

Often animals are named for some special features they have. The mountain lion's species name is concolor. **Concolor** means one color. Mountain lions don't have any spots on their bodies when they are fully grown. Other wild cats in Idaho, bobcats and lynx, do have spots or markings on their bodies when they are fully grown. The striped skunk's scientific name is *Mephitis mephitis*. Mephitis means an offensive smell or stench. That makes sense!

Next time you see a scientific name, do a little research and find out what the name means. You might be surprised by what you find!



Photos top to bottom:
White-tailed Jackrabbit CCBY USFWS
Mountain-Prairie
Bobcat CCBY e_monk on Flickr
Mountain Lion CCBY USFWS
Mountain-Prairie

Hunt ... or be Hunted



When 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.





ANIMAL HIDE & SEEK

Sometimes 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.

Whether hunter or hunted, camouflage helps animals to survive.

Photos Left to right, top to bottom:
Bandwinged Grasshopper CCBY Katja Schulz Flickr
Garter Snake CCBY Mary K Johnson
Praying Mantis CCBY Michael Milqueen on Flickr
Jackrabbit Freepik
Jackrabbit CCBY USFWS Mountain Prairie on Flickr

LOOK... A MOUNTAIN LION!



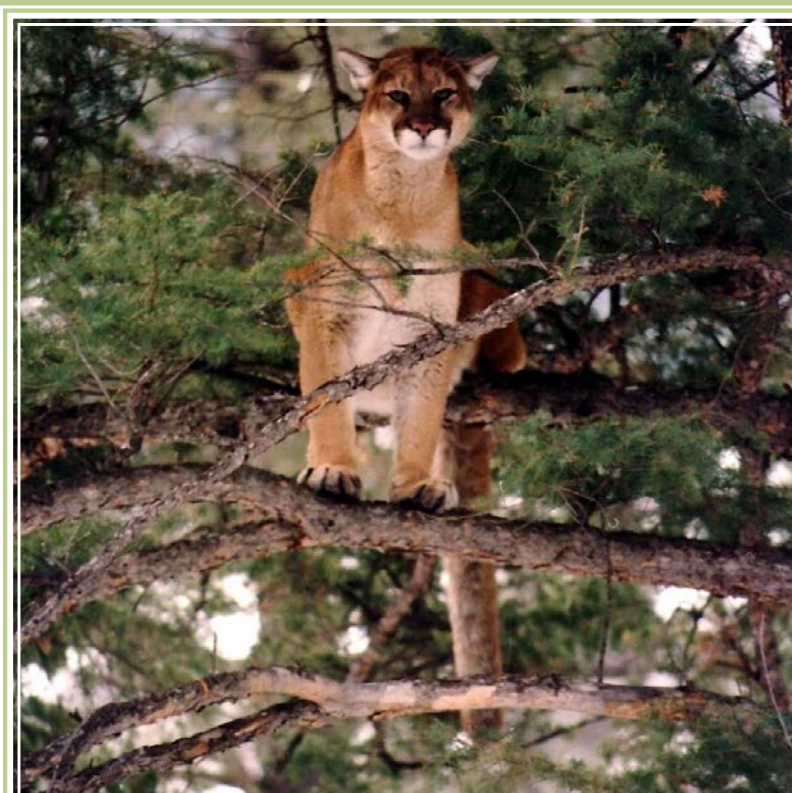
It is a rare treat to see a mountain lion in the wild. They are usually secretive, shy, and quiet. They also blend into their surroundings very well. It can be difficult to see them against a tree or dry hillside.

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.

- **Make noise.** Clap your hands and talk in a loud, firm voice. Tell the mountain lion to "Go Away!" Do not scream. High pitched screams may sound like prey animals.
- **Younger children should stand close by an adult.** If you are in a group, stand together so you appear like one big animal. The larger you look, the better your chances of scaring the mountain lion away.
- **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 in the eyes and nose with your stick.
- **Pepper spray used for bear attacks will also deter mountain lions.** It is a good idea to carry pepper spray while hunting, fishing or hiking whenever you are in areas where bears or mountain lions are found.



Be Outside!



BE OUTSIDE
IDAHO CHILDREN IN NATURE

Solving Animal Mysteries!

Cold weather is no excuse to stay inside!

Late autumn and winter are great times to get outside and explore. Bare trees and snow make familiar places look quite different. There is a certain hush in the air during this time. Cold nips your cheeks and makes you look forward to a cup of hot chocolate after being outside.

There are many fall and winter activities to try. Hunting, skiing, skating and sledding may come to your mind. But what about tracking? Animals that you rarely see can now be “seen” when you find their tracks in mud or snow. Tracking can be a lot of fun. It’s a bit like playing detective. You observe, gather clues and do your best to put the clues together to solve a mystery. It also can be difficult at times. Here are some tips to consider when figuring out what animal left a track.

Look at the track from all directions. Are there other clues nearby? You may need more than a footprint to guess the animal correctly. Look for clues like chew marks, bones or scat. Scat is animal poop, and it is often one of the best clues you may find to solve your animal mystery.

Notice the size of the track and its shape. A mountain lion track is round. A circle would fit nicely around it. Mammal tracks are made up of marks left by the claws, toes, palms, heels and the space between the toes and pads. Not every track will show all of these things, of course. It all depends on the animal, and what the animal was doing at the time the track was left. Mountain lion tracks usually only have marks left by the toes and palms. Can you guess why the claws rarely leave marks?



How many toe marks show in the track?

Four toes will show on mountain lion tracks. The smallest toe is usually found on the inside of most mammals’ feet. This can help you tell if a track is from the left or right foot of an animal.

Take a picture of the track. Once you are safe and warm inside, compare your track to what you find in tracking books and on the internet. You might be surprised by the animals that are out and about this time of year.

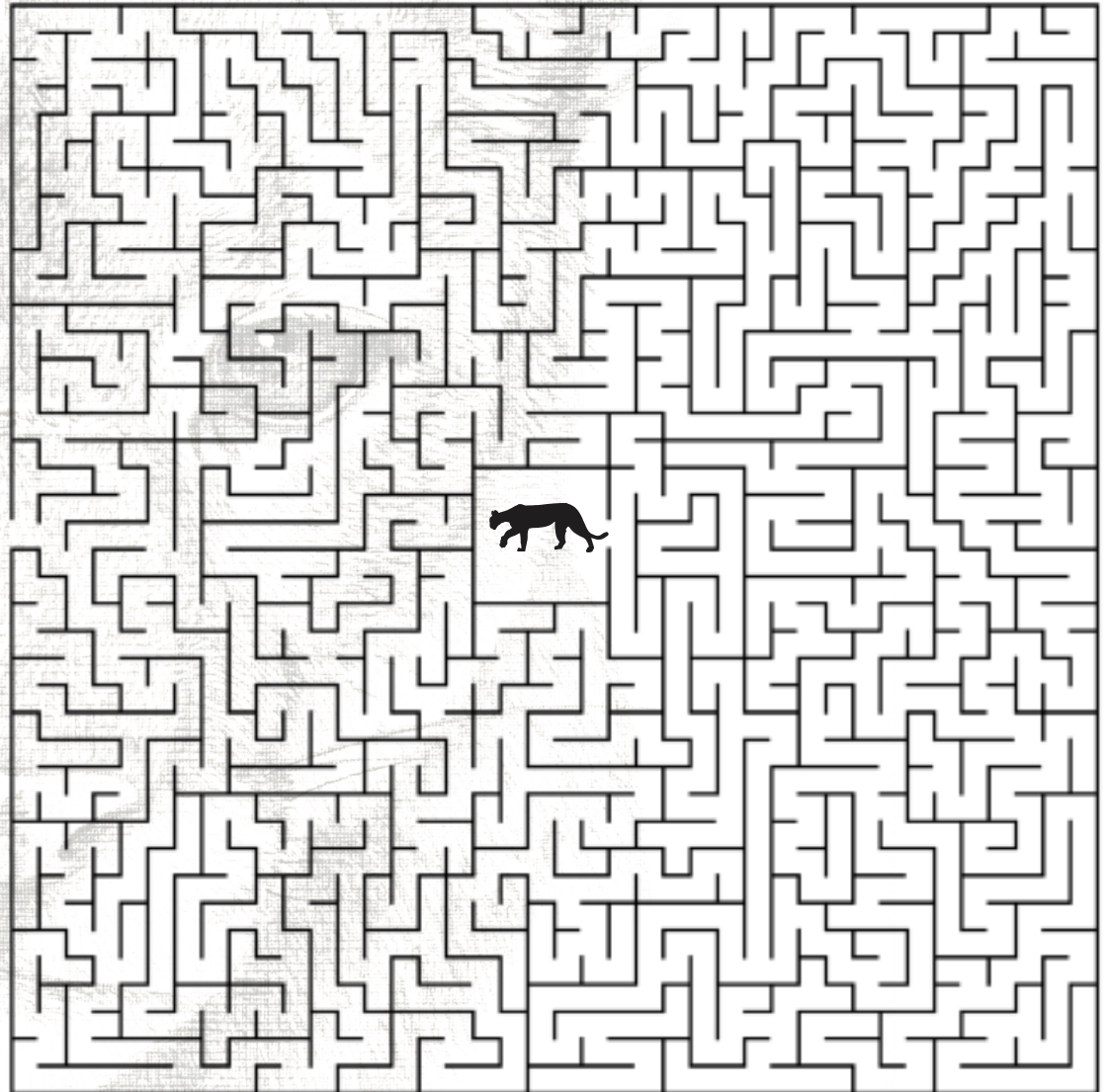
No matter what kind of activity you enjoy, dressing properly is very important. Wear layers that you can take off when you warm up and put back on if you feel cold. Snow pants can help you stay warm even if there is no snow on the ground. Warm boots are very important and don’t forget a hat and gloves.

Don’t stay cooped up this autumn and winter; bundle up and head outside. Look for tracks and see if you can solve an animal mystery!



MOUNTAIN LION MAZE

HELP THE MOUNTAIN LION FIND ITS PREY



Illustrations CCBY IDFG

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to:

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