

The ECF Update

Newsletter of the Eastern Cougar Foundation



Bringing Back a Legend

December Part 1--2009

2009: No. 3 of 4



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Panther Headdress: *A stoic and proud Timucua warrior wears a panther headdress, perhaps as a symbol of high military rank. The eyes of the panther are of highly polished shells that reflect light. The radical American psychologist, James Hillman, suggests that ceremonial headdresses reflect our instinct "to gain the animal eye...bringing our superior posture to the level of the creature, kneeling to it..." On page 7, Christopher Spatz explores our need to see the divine animal. More on the Timucua Indians and artist on Page 2.*

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More on the Timucua Indians and the Artist: At the dawn of European settlement, as many as 200,000 Timucua Indians lived in central and northern Florida and adjacent parts of Georgia. Villages were divided into family clans, usually bearing animal names. Their first major encounter with Caucasians was in 1539, when Hernando de Soto and his army of 500 marched through Timucua territory, causing many deaths from warfare and diseases. By 1821, only five Timucua remained, and the Timucua ceased to exist as a tribe. Florida panthers once roamed the same area; today only scattered dispersers wander through. We can restore panthers to parts of its former range, but the Timucua are gone forever.

Panther Headdress is an illustration from the book FLORIDA'S LOST TRIBES, illustrated by Theodore Morris with commentary by Jerald T. Milanich. You can purchase a print of this painting and other illustrations from the book from Morris' website -<http://www.floridalosttribes.com/prints.htm>. We thank Ted Morris for permission to use this painting on the cover of *The ECF Update*.

Delay in *The ECF Update*: We apologize for the delay in getting out issues No. 3 and 4 for 2009. The final issue should be available soon and will cover many recent events in the Blank Space—the former range of the cougar.

**--AERIE Mountain Lion Tracking, Management,
and Ecology Workshop, January 26-29 and
February 9-12, 2010**

The American Ecological Research Institute (--AERIE) is pleased to announce its 5th annual "Mountain Lion Tracking, Management, and Ecology Workshop." Conducted over 4 days in the Rocky Mountains of Montana, among the continent's most spectacular wildlife habitat, the 2010 4-day field sessions will run Tuesday-Friday, January 26th-29th, and again February 9th-12th, near Great Falls, Montana. Attendees should plan on using the Monday and the Saturday of those weeks as travel days.



Geared toward wildlife biologists, managers, and other natural resource professionals seeking to enhance their knowledge of locating, tracking, monitoring, and managing the mountain lion and other carnivores, during the 4-day program participants will learn mountain lion search and survey techniques (i.e. transecting, camera trapping, trail- and road-hunting, etc...), as well as the definitive and often times subtle characteristics of mountain lion sign (tracks, trails, gait patterns, scat, scrapes, kills, etc.), including differentiation of the different sexes and age classes of the cat.

Field time predominates during this unique course. It is supplemented with personalized instruction and training on mountain lion ecology and behavior, and discussions of carnivore capture techniques, immobilization science and philosophy, safe animal handling, and depredation investigation.

For details and testimonials, or if you are interested in scheduling a private course specifically for your own group or organization, please visit ECF's website, www.easterncougar.org and contact:

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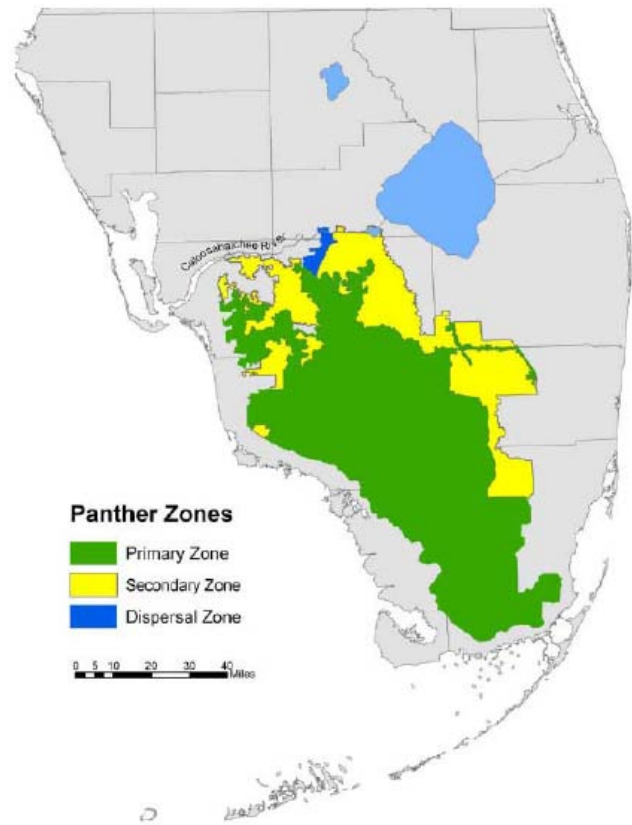
CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY FILES PETITION FOR CRITICAL HABITAT FOR FLORIDA PANTHER

On September 17th, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) filed a petition with the US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) requesting designation of 3.1 million acres of critical habitat for panthers in southern Florida. Two other organizations joined CBD: Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) and the Council of Civic Associations, Inc. If the FWS does not respond by December 17th, a lawsuit will be filed. Two other conservation organizations have filed separate petitions for critical habitat for the panther.

The critical habitat proposed by the CBD includes a Primary Zone, where the existing breeding population lives; a Secondary Zone, which offers some potential for the population to expand; and a Dispersal Zone that would preserve limited opportunities for panthers to naturally disperse into south-central Florida if they can reach the Caloosahatchee River. These zones were identified in the third revision of the Recovery Plan for the panther issued by the FWS in December 2008.

The main threat to the continued survival of the only existing cougar population in the East is development. More than 13 million people call Florida home. New towns, new homes, and new businesses lead to more and wider highways, which lead to more panthers being killed by vehicles. More people also lead to more potential conflicts. Recently, panthers have been involved in some pet and livestock depredation, but no attacks on humans.

So far, the FWS has elected not to designate critical habitat for the panther. The panther was listed in the original Endangered Species Act in 1973, when critical habitat designations for listed species were authorized but not mandated. If panthers had been listed as endangered species after 1978, the FWS would have had to consider designating critical habitat at the same time that the regulation listing the new endangered species was proposed “to the maximum extent prudent.” But generally, the FWS has not recommended critical habitat for newly listed species.



Even though no critical habitat has been defined, the FWS is still required to determine if any project requiring approval by the federal government would jeopardize the big cat’s continued existence. FWS South Florida Field Supervisor Paul Souza has adopted a lax definition of “jeopardy.” Between 1984 and 2007, the FWS engaged in 112 formal consultations regarding proposed developments in the range of the panther. They issued permits that have impacted or will impact more than 94,000 acres of panther habitat. But no jeopardy decisions have been issued. In December 2008, Souza was quoted as saying that saving the panther is “the greatest species conservation challenge in the country,” but between 1993 and December 2008, the FWS did not turn down a single development application.

Designation of critical habitat would raise the ante for developers seeking permits in panther habitat. Not only would the FWS be required to determine that a proposed development would not jeopardize the continued existence of the panther, the developments also could not “result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat” for the panther.

Without critical habitat, the future is bleak for the long-term survival of the panther. Sam Hamilton, President Obama’s newly appointed Director of the FWS, approved all but one of 5,974 development permits and other federal actions between 2004 and 2006 when he was head of the Southeastern Region of the FWS, which encompasses ten states. In contrast, the Rocky Mountain Division of the FWS issued 100 jeopardy permits out of 586 consultations.

The September 17th petition was the fourth recent formal effort by non-governmental organizations to stop or control development in panther habitat. The first was in 2003, when Save Our Big Scrub, Inc. filed a petition for designation of critical habitat for panthers throughout the state of Florida. Eventually, the FWS rejected the petition on November 21, 2008. Field supervisor Souza says that designating critical habitat for panther will take time and resources away from higher priority actions, such as panther crossings under highways, studies of the health and size of the panther population, and “working with partners to preserve habitat.”

In June 2008 a consortium of environmental organizations and large landowners announced the new Panther Protection Plan (Plan) for almost 200,000 acres around Immokalee in eastern Collier County. Environmental organizations signing on include the Collier County Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Florida Wildlife Federation. The Plan would create two new panther travel routes, a possible \$150 million fund to pay for habitat and safe highway crossings for wildlife, increase federal mitigation requirements for building in panther habitat, and reward Collier County landowners who preserve farms and citrus groves with development credits. Up to 45,000 acres would be freed for development. New developments would pay for the fund.



◀ **Ave Maria under construction.**

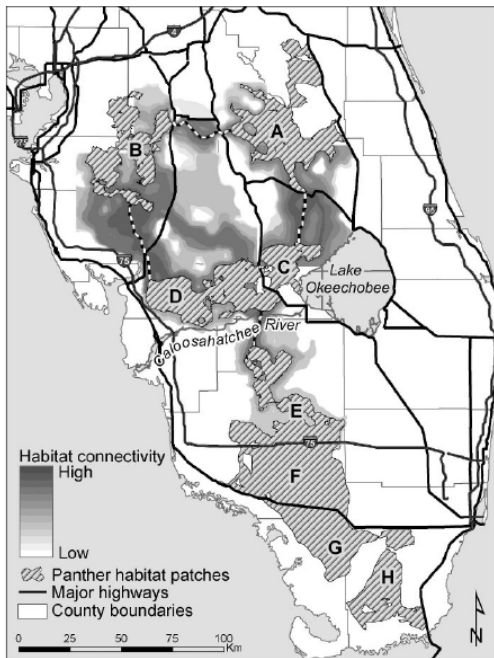
The Conservancy of Southwest Florida (Conservancy) did not join the consortium. They were concerned that the Plan might actually encourage over-development. A new college town, Ave Maria, associated with a new Catholic university of the same name, opened in 2007. Eventually Ave Maria will include 8,000 residential units on 5,000 acres of panther habitat. Another new town, Big Cypress, which will encompass 3,600 acres with 9,000 residential units, is in the works. Unlike

Ave Maria, Big Cypress will be in primary panther habitat. The Conservancy has opposed the Plan’s impacts on primary panther habitat.

The scientific panel—the Florida Panther Protection Program Technical Review Team—issued its review of the Plan on October 15th. The 80-page report concluded that the Plan “would represent an enhancement of panther conservation” over existing controls. They recommended numerous modifications, such as additional protection of primary habitat and corridors wider than 300 feet to enable panthers to move from one block of habitat to another, and rejected a proposed new interchange on Interstate 75. The panel includes David Shindle, a panther biologist with the Conservancy. If the panel’s recommendations are followed, Conservancy President Andrew McElwaine says that the plan would be “very close” to a proposal put forth by their organization.

The Conservancy had filed a petition with President Obama in January 2009 requesting designation of the same 3.1 million acres as critical habitat as the later CBD petition. Five Florida Congressmen signed on in support. The main difference between the Conservancy’s petition and that submitted by the CBD is that the latter may be followed by a lawsuit if the FWS does not respond. The FWS made a noncommittal response to the Conservancy’s petition in June.

Then on November 19th, the Sierra Club filed a supplementary petition to the Conservancy’s. The petition focuses on likely loss of habitat within the panther’s present range as a result of a rise in ocean levels, accompanied by an increase in hurricanes and flooding, all brought on by global warming. The petition also adds a Primary Dispersal/Expansion Area just north of the Caloosahatchee River, which so far has been a barrier to northward dispersal of females. The total area would almost double the amount of potential panther habitat north of the Caloosahatchee, but it is of marginal quality and could perhaps support up to 36 panthers but probably not a breeding population.



The FWS is often slow to react to lawsuits such as the CBD’s, but eventually they must do so. Michael Robinson of the CBD says, “... the government can delay action for years, but ultimately they must act. Without action, that endangered species will go extinct.”

◀ **Four additional areas of critical habitat proposed by the Sierra Club north of the Caloosahatchee River: Avon Park (A), Duette Park (B), Fisheating Creek (C) and Babcock-Webb (D). From Sierra Club petition.**

In the long run, the only way to remove the panther from the Endangered Species list is to establish at least two additional populations, each with at least 240 cats, in their former range outside of southern Florida. The panthers probably will not be able to do this on their own. All of the approximately 20 confirmations of panthers (which represent fewer than 20 panthers) outside of southern Florida in the past 20 years have been young males. As with cougars elsewhere, females are

much less likely to disperse. If they do, they will find marginal habitat in south-central Florida. The CBD has assured us that they will work on reintroduction in the future after the FWS responds to the critical habitat petition.

Thanks to Andrew McElwaine, President of the Conservancy, for reviewing this article and making several suggestions. However, any errors are ours alone.

Update: In the third week of December, all five environmental organizations filed notices of intent to sue the FWS for failing to provide critical habitat for the panther.

The Eastern Cougar Foundation and the Florida Panther Society (FPS) are proud that they introduced the relatively new and highly effective Center for Biological Diversity to the fight to save the Florida panther. The CBD owes its success to its ability to use the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to its fullest extent to protect endangered and threatened species and habitat for all wildlife. They currently boast more than 240,000 members.

The ECF first approached Kierán Suckling, now Executive Director of the CBD, in February 2007 when we learned that Mark McCollough of the FWS Maine Field Office would be undertaking a Five-Year Review of the Eastern Cougar, Puma concolor couguar. We were concerned that the FWS would decide that native eastern cougars are extinct, recommend delisting (removal from the endangered species list), and allow individual states in the East to determine whether or not cougars should be protected within their borders.

We told Suckling that DNA evidence indicates there is only one subspecies of cougar in all of North America and that we were aware of no evidence of cougar populations outside of southern Florida. Suckling decided that the CBD could not use the ESA to protect free-ranging cougars in the East outside of Florida.

The ECF and Stephen Williams, president of the FPS, contacted Peter Galvin and Michael Robinson of the CBD in April 2009, seeking their help in getting the FWS to establish a timeline for panther reintroductions, once again omitted from their December 2008 Florida Panther Recovery Plan. The Recovery Plan concluded that the panther can be removed from the endangered list only if at least two populations are established in their former range outside of Florida. Classification of the panther was not an issue this time because in the 2008 Plan, the FWS states that not all cougar biologists agree that only one subspecies exists in North America. They chose to consider the Florida panther as a separate subspecies, Puma concolor coryi. The CBD was interested, and several months of research and networking between ECF, FPS, and the CBD ensued. Eventually CBD decided that the habitat of the only existing population of panthers first needed to be secured before advocating reintroductions.

FIVE-YEAR REVIEW UPDATE

The draft review of the status of the Eastern Cougar was sent to US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) biologists in Region 5 (the Northeast.). Some of them had comments. The regional office is now working on additional edits. When they are finished, the report will be sent to Regions 3 (Midwest) and 4 (Southeast) for further reviews. Then the draft will be available for comment by scientists outside the FWS, state wildlife agencies, and the general public. We expect that the review will recommend delisting of the Eastern Cougar because there is no evidence that any eastern populations survived in the East except in southern Florida, and because DNA indicates there was never a separate subspecies in the East. We are hopeful that the FWS will recommend restoration and reintroduction of cougars in suitable portions of their former range. We will be advocating this option. The big questions will be, Where should they be restored? and, Who will be responsible for these decisions—the FWS or individual states?

In the past, the FWS played a leading role in cougar studies nationwide. Ronald Nowak's landmark 1976 review, "The cougar in the United States and Canada" was done while he was employed by the FWS. In the same year, the FWS organized the first Mountain Lion Workshop. Now they are relatively inactive. It's time for them to resume their leadership role, as they have for reintroduction of wolves.



To read more about the Five-Year Review, see *The ECF Update* for March 2009, pp. 2-4, and March 2007, pp. 5-7. All past newsletters can be downloaded from our website, www.easterncougar.org

THE GIFT OF FEAR: SEEDS OF AWE

By Chris Spatz

When that cougar turned tail, a piece of my soul went with it...

Todd Lester, Founder
Eastern Cougar Foundation

In debates over the inscrutability of pumas prowling eastern forests, in our advocacy for restoring panthers and the attendant questions of public fear that recovery raises, in the remarkable *landscape of fear* research distilling how cougars guard and shepherd ecosystems, too often we lose sight of the cat tracking through our hearts and imaginations.

In its oldest definition, without its 21st century, zeitgeist baggage, fear means “reverential awe” – as being in the presence of a god. Fear’s synonym, anxiety, in Greek is *ananke*: necessity. Fear and anxiety: awe and necessity. Imagine that.

The Chauvet lion panel, about 30,000 years old, in Chauvet Cave in the Ardèche Valley, France. ▶



I can only guess at the intuition guiding deer and elk shadowed by predators, but what some of us apprehend in a sudden glimpse of animals both great and small – a coyote voling; a great horned owl lifting silently from its daytime roost; the lightning flash of a brookie seizing the stone fly – is a bolt of awe.

In tribal cultures and mythology, animals taught humans to dig and plow, what to eat, and how to hunt. They taught us to spin and to weave, to dance and to court. They bestowed fire and gave us speech. Wearing their skins and feathers we chanted and sang and danced around the flames, emulating their movement and display, in gratitude for their gifts.

Clans and tribes had their animal guardians and shepherds: Raven and Wolf, Shark and Crocodile, Mantis and Spider. During initiations, young men fasted, prayed, cried for an animal to guide and name them, to call and bless their awakening place as an adult member of the tribe. Shamans and medicine men summoned the animal familiars to their healing work. Devotionally interpreted throughout the life-works of Carl Jung’s American heirs, the mythologist Joseph Campbell, and the lively, astonishing psychologist James Hillman, animals were our first gods.

Etched and painted on rock and cave walls since the first stir of sapien wonder, our ancestors captured their awe, their reverence for animal grace. In a 1983 essay on *The Animal Kingdom in Human Dreams*, James Hillman suggests that their sleep appearances aren't about masked instincts or compensation for character flaws, or, psychology's tail-chasing elixir: symbols of personality. They arrive, says Hillman, unbidden, with their own purpose. He asks, provocatively, "Do they come so that we may see beauty, even to save beauty?" Is this not eminently clear echoing from the Paleolithic dream caverns of Chauvet and Lascaux?

To save beauty. Hillman makes the case that beyond diligent observations of eating and being eaten, food chains and fitful survival, courting and camouflage, the kaleidoscopic fecundity in animal coats, avian plumage, lizard and fish scales – their sheer ostentation, teeming pageantry, play and display – dazzling and delighting the eye, is an elemental reason for existence.

What business do peacocks and birds of paradise have toting around those ornate, unwieldy feathers when they aren't courting – what *did* the Creator have in mind – if not for the sake of beauty?

*Tiger, tiger burning bright
In the forests of the night
What immortal hand or eye
Dared frame thy fearful symmetry?*

Fearful symmetry: William Blake dared to conjure ancient awe.

Midst the cataclysms of climate change, biodiversity loss, and mass extinctions are we not also gutting Earth's animate tapestry of beauty? Conservation writers like David Quammen and ecologists like John Terborgh have warned that our grandchildren will inherit a planet of weeds, a pestilence of impoverished brown.

As weed monocultures are consuming eastern forests bereft of cougars, so have we since World War II been destroying vernacular, Main Street culture, spreading pell-mell cities in grid after grid of look-alike Levittowns, casting sprawl from Maine to Malibu largely in a coat of beige.

Yet, in these drab, suburban landscapes, in Connecticut and New Jersey, "ghost cat" sightings stalk and haunt, like scattered bits of the ecstatic, regenerating god, Dionysus, whose chariot – whose very force is drawn by *panthers* – sowing life into barren burbs, for months, for years, the grapevine rumor of Wild: the seeds of awe.



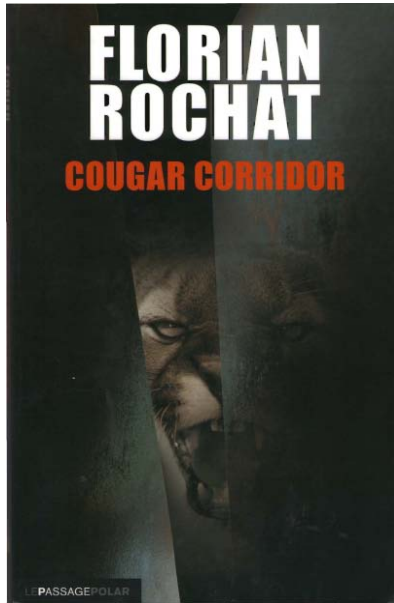
Something in us needs cougars, needs their beauty rendered with the felicity of our cave painting ancestors, and the necessity of grace bestowed upon a young coal miner rooted to an Appalachian mountain standing face-to-face with a mountain lion, who departed with a piece of his soul.

As the cougar guards desert and forest and mountain ecosystems, so, too, is she a shepherd of the soul.

Book Reviews

COUGAR CORRIDOR

By Florian Rochat. (2009: in French) Paperback, 235 pages. Publisher: Le Passage. Reviewed by Dr. Lucina Hernández, Director, Rice Creek Field Station/Assistant Professor, Department of Biological Sciences, SUNY Oswego, Oswego, NY



As a scientist with experience with terrestrial mammalian predators, including the cougar, I was curious to see how the topic of mountain lions was approached in a novel. With surprise and satisfaction, I learned that Florian Rochat has addressed the important and complex topics of predation and conservation in manner understandable to the public. Admirably, he does this without putting aside scientific information. Instead, he uses it to build a masterpiece. He puts his finger on the center of the problem of conserving many species—habitat fragmentation due to urbanization and ex-urbanization. To illustrate the problem, Rochat chose one species that here, in North America, faces this problem—the cougar.

In this scientifically well documented book, Rochat explains in an easy manner the facts of cougar biology, in particular dispersion. He explains why cougars need to travel long distances and why sometimes it is possible to see a cougar close to urban areas.

The book is passionate from the first page to the end; the author keeps the reader connected to the plot. Every day while I was reading the book, I told my husband John Laundré, who is a researcher of cougars, how interesting it was and that it provides important information to the public.

Even though the book is about the conflict between humans and cougars, other top predators, such as wolves and bears, also have the same conflicts with humans. **COUGAR CORRIDOR** is excellent in helping people understand the dimensions of human activities as they affect the conservation of these animals. This is amply displayed when the author talks about the everyday-more-frequent-desire of people to live close to wild and natural areas while failing to see that at the same time they are destroying and fragmenting the wilderness, destroying habitat for wildlife, and sooner or later may face close encounters with wild animals such as cougars (Page 30). The discussion of the cougar's attack on a young man was especially poignant regarding this sensitive and often over-exaggerated area of human-cougar conflicts. Usually, cougars are the ones who suffer the most in these interactions.

It is unfortunate that this country, where we are producing important scientific information about cougars, is the same country that doesn't want to use this valuable information to protect it. This is especially true for the endangered eastern cougar and Florida panther. We in United States are facing the consequences of the new urban development that affects one species when we lose wild habitat for the benefit of a few people. The cougar symbolizes the last bastion of real wilderness. The fact that the cougars still exist in some places means that we have healthy ecosystems there, with all their parts--flora and fauna (Page 30).

As Michael Dupuis (one of the characters in the book) states: "We should consider that wildlife and wild areas on the Earth have the right to continue wild and our society has the obligation to protect and conserve it" (Page 223). I hope that this book helps people understand the value of cougars and motivates the public to protect them. Rochat not only puts the problem on the table, he gives us the solution—conservation of natural corridors for this species and others—hence, the title of the book.

I recommend this book not only for the general public but also to undergraduate and graduate students of different disciplines who can analyze conflicts concerning the conservation of a predator. I also strongly encourage the author and publisher to consider translating this excellent book into Spanish and English so that North Americans outside of Quebec can read the important message Rochat so eloquently presents.

Editor's Note: Florian Rochat has lived in Switzerland all his life but has travelled to the US many times as a foreign correspondent and during vacations. He told me, "The idea of my novel came in 1992 with an article by Maurice Hornocker on mountain lions in The National Geographic which fascinated me. This led me to read the handful of general public books on cougars, then to interview Ken Logan in Moscow (Idaho) and Rich DeSimone (Montana) in 1999." Rich allowed him to participate in his project in the Garnett Range of Montana during the following two years. Rochat continues, "I tracked and collared lions with him and his aides. I explain all that on the "Making of" part of my blog".

Rochat's blog, <http://www.cougarcorridor.com/>, includes the link to a YouTube video of his work in Montana. A long passage is translated into English here: <http://www.cougarcorridor.com/wordpress/?p=219>

Marc Gauthier, whose pheromone lures have documented the presence of a few cougars in Quebec and New Brunswick, said this in his review on amazon.ca: "Having tracked cougars myself in this area of Montana and being closely interested in this species, I found this novel by Florian Rochat in the same time realistic, well researched and fascinating. Must be read by all those interested in environmental and conservation issues."

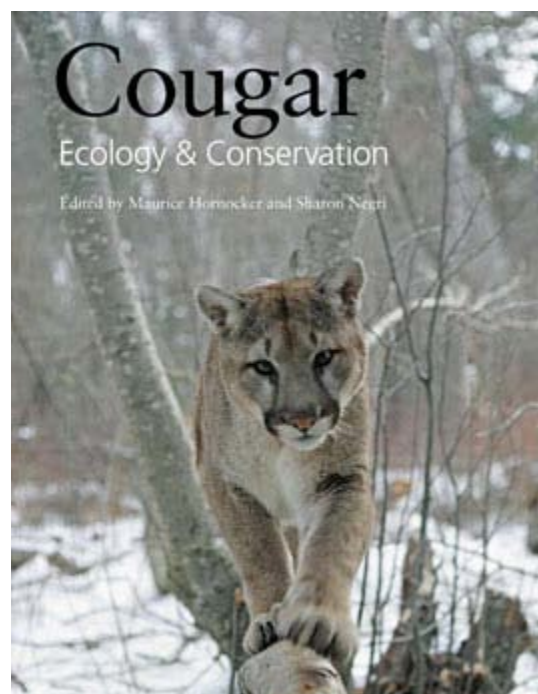
The book is not available from amazon.com in the US but can be ordered from the Canadian branch of amazon.com - http://www.amazon.ca/Cougar-corridor-Florian-Rochat/dp/2847421335/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1259675096&sr=1-1 The cost, including shipping, to my home in West Virginia, is about \$40.00 USD.

COUGAR CORRIDOR needs to be published in English and Spanish so that people in North America can benefit from Rochat's writing. Rochat has located an English translator and is looking for a publisher. If any of our readers have suggestions, please contact Rochat at flochat@bluewin.ch

COUGAR: ECOLOGY & CONSERVATION

Edited by Maurice Hornocker and Sharon Negri. 2009. University of Chicago Press, Chicago. 306 pp.

Peter Matthiessen says, "COUGAR is a mighty compendium by twenty-two cougar authorities who share considerable first-hand experiences in the field. A very important contribution, this book will surely take its place as the definitive work on this fascinating, beautiful, and ever elusive animal."



A STUDY OF URBAN AND RURAL RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD MOUNTAIN LIONS IN TWO MIDWESTERN STATES

Clay Nielsen¹ (kezo9z@siu.edu), Mae Davenport², and Jean Mangun²

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Although the increasing presence of mountain lions (*Puma concolor*) in the Midwest is of great interest to wildlife agencies, conservationists, agriculturalists, and the general public, few researchers have assessed human attitudes and perceptions towards mountain lions in this human-dominated landscape. With project funding graciously provided by The Shared Earth Foundation, we sent 2,000 mail-in surveys to residents of urban and rural counties in Kentucky (KY) and North Dakota (ND), respectively. These 2 states were chosen due to their position relative to cougar expansion in the Midwest (ND has breeding lions and KY does not). The survey instrument integrated a variety of questions regarding human attitudes towards mountain lions and their management in ND and KY. Six hundred fifty-one questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 33%. ND residents reported more experiences and perceived a greater likelihood of encounters with mountain lions, but were no more concerned about being attacked by mountain lions than KY residents. Urbanites valued the presence of mountain lions to a greater extent than rural residents, because they perceived mountain lions as a sign of a healthy environment and believed mountain lions will increase their quality of life. Rural residents, being more likely to be hunters and ranchers, were more wary of mountain lions, because they perceived greater risks of livestock and deer predation. ND residents had access to a wider array of sources for mountain lion information than did KY residents. Urban residents were more likely than rural residents to support policies that protect mountain lions and to oppose policies that control populations or compensate livestock owners for losses. Residents of both states, especially KY, would benefit from efforts aimed at educating the public about mountain lions and their management. Survey results indicate some deviation between perceptions and biological reality; this gap can be reduced via educational

initiatives. Given the differences between states and especially between rural vs. urban respondents, conservation agencies will have to develop diverse educational and management strategies for mountain lions, should they ever re-colonize the Midwest. Finally, from a human perspective, we conclude that the outlook is relatively bright for mountain lions should they re-colonize the Midwest. We surveyed people in 2 different states who both had generally positive opinions regarding mountain lions. This information, along with knowledge that 8% of the region comprises highly suitable habitat (LaRue and Nielsen 2008, *Ecological Modelling* 212:372-381), provides further insight into the potential of the Midwest to support mountain lions.



Originally printed in the *Wild Felid Monitor*, Summer 2009: Vol. 2, Issue 2, page 22. Reprinted here with the permission of Clay Nielsen and Chris Papouchis, editor of the *Monitor*. The *Monitor* is the newsletter of the Wild Felid Research and Management Association, www.wildfelid.com. If you are seriously interested in wild cats, you will enjoy this excellent publication.

LIVING WITH COUGARS NEAR GOLDEN, COLORADO

By Ramon Bisque

Part I: When we moved west to Colorado in 1959 I was aware of the existence of cougars but knew very little of them. When we left the town of Golden and chose a rural home site in the foothills in 1964, we enjoyed the presence of mule deer that used our property as a fawning area. The growing mule deer herds eventually led to a cougar population that has since drawn attention to our area. I believe that growth was due to the establishment of thousands of acres of Open Space. Unique in its rugged topography and surrounded by secluded areas, our growing rural “subdivision” was a perfect environment for cougars that depend on a thriving deer population.

When I began finding cougar kills with increasing frequency, and seeing free roaming cougars on numerous occasions, I realized that we were in a unique situation. We raised six children in the area and they roamed the valley and surrounding foothills for years. I realize now that they were “protected” by the prolific deer population, the same factor that brought the cougars to our doorsteps. In relating some of my experiences with the large cats, I often sensed a skepticism that I could understand. When you tell someone that you “felt” the presence of a cougar and then saw one watching you, only the best of friends didn’t reveal skepticism. Having spent a lot of time in the “woods” while growing up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, I was not a stranger to situations that gave me pause and altered my course. Wolves were a part of the scene and their presence elicits as many stories as do cougars. Although I never saw a free roaming wolf, I did hear them howl on at least one occasion. Their presence was a real part of what I “felt” in some situations, particularly when I was alone after dark.

When I investigated the literature on cougars, I began to realize the unparalleled nature of our situation. Statements made by experts attested to that uniqueness. M. Hornocker wrote: “... the mountain lion now hangs out in areas where man rarely ventures.” Edward Abbey stated: “Only the very lucky ever see this beautiful monster in the wild.” When I talked with professional cougar hunters, they admitted that they have seen very few cougars without the use of dogs. We were obviously in a situation that has evolved recently as humans intrude into the cougar’s environment. In 2003, that realization prompted me to begin writing **LIONS OF THE LYONS**, which I published in 2004.

The book focuses on first hand experiences and relies in a significant way on the photos taken by friends and neighbors, one in particular, Mark Adams. Mark, an artisan and saddle maker, works at home and always has a camera at the ready. We heard the cries of a doe under attack and sprinted to within less than 100 yards of the kill site.



The first photo that Mark took of horses and deer reacting to the attack is a prime example of a picture being “worth a thousand words.” The victim was still thrashing when the photo was taken, throat held fast in the fangs of the cougar. It was broad daylight and we were able to take other photos as the cougar followed its routine of venting the chest cavity for a first dining, caching the carcass, and in this case, returning later to move the carcass. She was aware that we were observing her. Other photos taken that day and a diary of the events can be seen on our web site. (*To view the sequence of related photos taken on that day see www.bisque.com/ray/cougar.*)

I am a geo-scientist by trade, a retired professor, and have done a lot of “book learning” and research, but my lessons in “cougarology” conducted by Professor Puma are most vivid and memorable.

On the subject of danger. I trust that the generation that includes our adult children who live in the area (five families) have spent as much time warning their offspring about human predators as they have about cougars. I can imagine that the youngsters find it easier to put the danger from cougars in perspective than they do the danger from humans. We are as vigilant as possible and I am not hesitant to say that I would take drastic action if I saw imminent danger to any human from a predator. On the other hand I have no desire to see the cougar eliminated from the environment in which I live. We have established a Conservation Easement to protect forty acres of prime cougar habitat. A neighbor did the same. The balance between a prolific deer population and controlled quota hunting has resulted in a manageable cougar population.

I am not a cougar expert, just a fortunate outdoorsman who happened to move into their territory. Over the past five decades, we have spent countless hours hunting and fishing in other mountainous areas of Colorado without ever seeing a cougar.

When I decided to write about the cougars in our area I didn’t have a crusade in mind, I just wanted to share our unique experiences. When I discovered that many neighbors were totally unaware of the presence of cougars, I did publish a low-key warning, suggesting folks should not ignore the potential danger. Because I had mentioned danger and also the existing quota hunting regulations, an editor of a small monthly news magazine pounced on that warning as a call for the extinction of the cougar and suggested that we should move into the city. I had my first glimpse of the emotion surrounding *Puma concolor*. My book includes a brief chapter entitled “Cougar Attacks on Humans.” I felt it would be irresponsible not to broach the subject. The inclusion of that chapter was prompted in large part by my discussions with a local game officer who investigated the attack on young Scott Lancaster who was killed while jogging near Idaho Springs, Colorado. I could not ignore the gruesome details of that event and others like it.

Part II will be in the next issue of The ECF Update. Ramon (Ray) Bisque is helping ECF by providing us with copies of his book to sell on our website, as well as donating a portion of the revenue he takes in from sales of the book on his own website.

Join the Eastern Cougar Foundation

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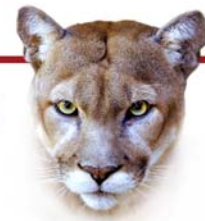
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Annual dues are \$20.00. Send your check to the Eastern Cougar Foundation (address on left). Don’t forget to include your address and email address. If you prefer, you can join online from our website. If you wish to contribute more than \$20.00, or your financial situation makes \$20.00 a hardship, you can use the donation option and let us know that you are paying dues (as opposed to making a donation).

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LORDS OF NATURE: Life in a Land of Great Predators



Lords of Nature, reviewed in the June 2009 issue of the *Update*, is being shown throughout the country. The film explains how scientists are discovering that top predators such as wolves and cougars are revitalizing forces of nature, and how society is learning tolerance for beasts they once banished. “This is an incredible opportunity for people to learn about scientific discoveries we need to consider and incorporate into our decision-making on managing wildlife and public lands,” said co-producer Ralf Meyer of Green Fire Productions.

A full house joined Nadia Steinzor of the Coalition to Restore the Eastern Wolf (CREW) and ECF’s President Chris Spatz for a showing at the Wolf Conservation Center in New Salem, New York on October 10th. Two months later, many of the 540 participants in the Carnivores 2009 conference, mostly carnivore advocates, viewed it in Denver. A member of the audience observed that the film was preaching to the choir in Denver, that it will be necessary to get the word out to people who are not aware of the value of carnivores. Co-producer Karen Anspacher-Meyer said they are working to get the film shown on cable TV.

We can do our part. Individual copies are \$22.95 when ordered from www.lordsofnature.org. It is being sold at a wholesale price of \$10 to nature centers, natural history museums, bookstores, etc. You can suggest places that might carry the film to Green Fire by contacting Karen at karen@greenfireproductions.org

People and organizations who want to purchase DVDs to give to friends, schools, libraries, colleagues, decision makers, etc., can buy the DVDs for \$5 each. Green Fire requests a list of who received the DVDs so they can have an idea of the program’s reach. A minimum purchase of 10 DVDs is needed for this pricing.

If you want to do your part to make “trophic cascade” a household word, persuade them to also obtain a copy of *WHERE THE WILD THINGS WERE* by Will Stolzenburg. The book is getting outstanding reviews. Used hardbound copies can be purchased for as little as \$5.00 from used book dealers affiliated with amazon.com and alibris.com.

Visit the Lords of Nature website for a map and list of upcoming showings, information on how to host an event in your community, and a discussion guide for home screenings. Green Fire is also seeking donations to cover the cost of putting on *Lords of Nature* events, pursuing broadcast opportunities, providing DVDs to university science and environmental policy departments, etc.

Bringing Back the Legend: Cougar Recovery in Eastern North America New Salem, New York--Sunday, January 10th

The search for the eastern cougar is one of the great riddles in North American natural history. Despite thousands of sightings from Maine to Mississippi, only a dozen confirmations have emerged east of Chicago during the past generation. Join Christopher Spatz of the Eastern Cougar Foundation (ECF) for a special talk about the behavior, biology and current range of this elusive cat. Spatz will explain why sightings don’t produce evidence, and how restorations of this magnificent predator are imperative for the recovery of critically declining eastern forests. Guests will also join in a howl while visiting with ambassador wolves-Kaila, Apache, Lukas and Atka. Pre-registration is required. To register, visit the Wolf Conservation Center online at http://nywolf.org/typo3/event_calendar/index.php?event_id=523&edate=2010-1-10&id=17 or call them at (914) 763-2373. Time: 2:00 pm. Fee: \$15 – Adults, \$12 – Children under 12.