

Eastern Cougar Foundation



*A non-profit, science-based, volunteer-run conservation organization
dedicated to recovery of cougars (mountain lions) as the top predators in wild areas of eastern and
central North America.*

March 2007

COUGAR EXPERTS ATTACK ONTARIO

The Ontario Puma Foundation will host the 3rd Midwestern-Eastern Puma Conference at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario on May 23-26, 2007. Stuart Kenn, president of the Ontario Puma Foundation, will be accompanied by several puma scientists from across North and South America. This three-day international conference will deliver everything you ever wanted to know regarding the current status, recovery strategies, and management plans of pumas in Ontario, eastern Canada, and the eastern and central United States.

The agenda for the conference is just about complete, although last minute changes are always possible—even likely. Almost everyone who attended the 2004 conference in Morgantown, West Virginia agreed it was a great experience. This time we will have the opportunity to talk with cougar enthusiasts and advocates of wildlands protection on both sides of the border. You can get full information from the conference website, www.pumaconference.com. If you are not comfortable with the Internet, you can get needed information from Stuart Kenn, 905-729-4273; mailing address: Box 580, Beeton, Ontario L0G 1A0.

INSIDE

Conference Agenda

Photos—Snowtracking Cougars in Montana

ECF News: Where's Todd? ECF Income & Expenditures in 2006

Eastern Cougar Up for First Five-Year Review--Delisting to Follow?

Risk and Reality of Attacks on Humans



Peterborough, Ontario, Canada
May 23 -26, 2007

PASSPORT ALERT! If you are even thinking of flying to the conference, be aware that you will need a passport to get back into the US. This requirement was added in late January of this year. I have learned that there is a backup of applications in the National Passport Processing Center. They simply don't have the staff to deal with the flood of applications brought on by this new requirement. It could easily take more than 8 weeks to get a new one. You don't need a passport if you are driving, but it will save you some hassles at the border. It costs \$97.00 to get a passport if you have never had one, and \$67.00 to renew one that is 10-15 years old. In either case, you need passport photos.

Note that a meeting open to all dues-paying members of ECF is scheduled for Friday evening. We will be discussing issues such as: "What is our cause?" and "Where are we going?" Please let me know if you are planning to attend this meeting (Helen McGinnis, helenmcginnis@frontiernet.net or 304-227-4166). We may also be able to car pool for the drive to Ontario.

3rd Midwestern - Eastern Puma Conference, 2007

PRELIMINARY AGENDA

May 23 - 26, 2007

www.pumaconference.com

Wednesday, May 23

6:00 - 9:00 pm

Pre-Meeting Social Hour and Registration (Hors d'oeuvres and Cash Bar)

Thursday, May 24

7:00 - 8:25 am

8:25 - 8:40 am

8:40 - 8:55 am

8:55 - 9:00 am

Full Hot Breakfast and Registration

Hiawatha First Nations

[To be announced]

Welcome, Introductions, Safety and Security

Session I: Regional Reports - Sightings, Evidence, and Analysis (Moderator: Natalie Helferty)

9:00 - 9:30 am

New Brunswick & Nova Scotia (Anne-Sophie Bertrand)

9:30 - 10:00 am

Quebec (Le Duing Lang)

10:00 - 10:15 am

Break

10:15 - 10:45 am

Ontario (Stuart Kenn)

10:45 - 11:15 am

Kittatinny/Shawangunk Ridge Corridor (Christopher Spatz)

11:15 - 11:45 am

West Virginia (Helen McGinnis)

11:45 - 1:00 pm

Lunch

(Moderator: Jay Tischendorf)

1:00 - 1:30 pm

Kentucky (Judy Tipton)

1:30 - 2:00 pm

Michigan (Charles Psenka)

2:00 - 2:30 pm

Manitoba (Natalie Helferty, OPF on behalf of Bill Watkins)

2:30 - 3:00 pm

Dakotas (Tom Huhnerkoch)

3:00 - 3:15 pm

Break

3:15 - 3:45 pm

Analogy of Puma Studies in Latin America (Anne-Sophie Bertrand)

3:45 - 4:15 pm

25 Years in the Cougar Game - A Biologist's Eclectic Insights & Musings (Dr. Jay Tischendorf)

4:15 - 5:00 pm

History, Controversies, and Taxonomy of Animal Conservation in the East (Ron Nowak)

5:00 - 5:30 pm

Panel Discussion

5:30 - 6:00 pm

Social

6:00 - 7:30 pm Banquet Dinner (Awards Ceremony - 7:15 pm)
7:30 - 9:00 pm Keynote Address: The Lion and the Jewel
Researching Pumas in Yellowstone National Park (Dr. Jay Tischendorf)

Friday, May 25

7:00 - 8:25 am **Full Hot Breakfast and Registration**
8:25 - 8:30 am Day 2 Welcome and Introduction

Session II: Population and Range Studies (Moderator: Helen McGinnis)

8:30 - 9:10 am Yellowstone Lion - Implications for the Search for Pumas in East & Mid N.A. (Dr. Jay Tischendorf)

9:10 - 9:50 am A Probabilistic Approach to the Estimation of Puma Populations (Kee Dewdney)

9:50 - 10:30 am Conservation Studies (Dr. Frank Mallory)

10:30 - 11:00 am

Poster Session and Break

1. Niagara Escarpment (Lisa Grbinicek)
2. Puma Dispersal - Between Canada and USA (Stuart Kenn)
3. Attacks, Human Fear & Co-Existence (Alisha Sutton)
4. Puma Sightings of Connecticut (Bob Tougias)
5. Name - Subject

Session III: Habitat Conservation (Moderator: Kee Dewdney)

11:00 - 11:30 am Wildlands Project (Conrad Reining)

11:30 - 12:00 am Core and Connective Habitat - What this means for the Puma in the Northeast (Sue Morse)

12:00 - 1:00 pm

Lunch

1:00 - 1:30 pm Evolution of Creatures of the Shadow into Landscape Species (Peter O'Shea)

1:30 - 2:00 pm Nature Conservancy of Canada (John Riley)

2:00 - 2:30 pm Algonquin to Adirondack (Emily Conger)

2:30 - 3:00 pm Forest Cover on the Niagara Escarpment (Lisa Grbinicek)

3:00 - 3:15 pm

Break

3:15 - 4:15 pm Old Growth Forest versus Mixed Forest: Habitat for Pumas (Gene Odato)

Session IV: Wildlife Conservation, Management, and Education (Moderator: Stuart Kenn)

4:15 - 4:45 pm Cougar Management Guidelines and Implementation & Refinement Programme (Linda Sweanor)

4:45 - 5:15 pm Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (Gord Miller)

5:15 - 5:45 pm Panel Discussion

5:45 - 6:05 pm Conference Close

Dinner on your own

8:00 - 9:00 pm Ontario Puma Foundation Annual General Meeting (OPF Members)

8:00 - 9:00 pm **Eastern Cougar Foundation meeting open to all dues-paying members**

Saturday, May 26

7:00 - 8:00 am **Full Hot Breakfast and Registration**

Session V: Workshops

8:15 am - 12:30 pm **(Limited Seating)**
Field Trip to Jungle Cat World (Entry Fee) [**Limit - 46 People**]

Established to promote the welfare of and encourage the advancement and improvement of zoology, recreation, education, conservation and science.

OR

8:00 - 9:00 am Wildlife Tracks, Signs, and Skulls (Don McLeod) [**Limit - 50 People**]

9:10 - 10:10 am DNA Building and Laboratory Tour (Dr. Brad White) [**Limit - 45 People**]

10:20 - 11:20 am Native Stories (Hiawatha First Nations/Trent University) [**Limit - 50 People**]

11:30 - 12:30 am Analysing Evidence in the Field (Jim Eadie) [**Limit - 50 People**]

HOMeward BOUND. THANK YOU. HAVE A SAFE TRIP!



In February, Kerry Gyekis accepted Jay Tischendorf's offer of a trip to Montana's Front Range to search for evidence of cougars where they undoubtedly occur. Success! In four days, they found tracks of one male and two females. One of the females had killed an elk calf and left numerous scats near the kill site. Photos from that trip are reproduced in this newsletter. Here's Kerry overlooking the habitat of the big male.

Scheduled PowerPoint Talks by Kerry Gyekis in Pennsylvania:

April 15th at the PA DCNR
Environmental Center at Jennings in
Slippery Rock
May 19th at the PA DCNR
Environmental Center at Kings Gap near
Carlisle.
For details contact Kerry at
gyekis@epix.net or at 570-353-6682.

ECF NEWS

Where's Todd? He's still with us. He has been overwhelmed by work, including a two-hour round trip commute to the new mine he has been assigned to, in addition to family responsibilities. His wife Jacquetta, who used to be ECF's Treasurer, has a full college course load, leading to a degree in Education, and in addition is working full time. To relieve the pressure on her time, Judy Tipton has taken over as ECF's treasurer. We all hope that Todd will soon find employment that is less demanding on his time and less risky to his health and safety.

ECF Income and Expenditures, 2006: The ECF took in \$1,072.27 and spent \$1,430.39.

Expenditures included the following:

Copying and mailing the Proceedings of the Eastern Cougar Conference 2004 - \$542.12
Remote camera expenses: estrous cougar urine, shipping cameras to Jay Tischendorf in Montana, developing film - \$313.39
Newsletter printing and postage - \$213.74
Purchase of 20 copies of Chris Bolgiano books at wholesale price - \$207.00
Fees (Business Tax renewal, Statutory Attorney fee, post office box fee) - \$81.00
Printing copies of brochure - \$73.14

With more members paying more membership dues, we could purchase more remote cameras and supplies and help volunteer members with the travel, registration and lodging fees needed to attend conferences, training courses such as the Cougar Field Workshop offered by the Cougar Network this month, and hearings. We could submit scat, hair and other samples for DNA analysis to determine if they are cougar or not, and to determine if they are North American or Latin American. We could produce educational materials to get accurate information on cougars out to the public in the central and eastern United States.

EASTERN COUGAR UP FOR FIRST FIVE-YEAR REVIEW

Delisting to Follow?

The eastern cougar (*Puma concolor cougar*) is undergoing its first five-year review. The presumed subspecies was listed as an endangered species in the same year that the present Endangered Species Act (ESA) was passed—1973. The US Fish & Wildlife Service is responsible for listing federal endangered and threatened species and for periodically evaluating the status of listed species. Dr. Mark McCollough, an endangered species specialist in the Service's office in Old Town, Maine, is responsible for the review. The Service has set up a special website for the review: <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/ECougar>. The following states are included: CT, DC, DE, IL, IN, KY, MA, MD, ME, MI, NC, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, SC, TN, VA, VT, and WV.

At the website, you will find several documents and two separate email addresses: one for expert input and one for public input. The first address is for confirmed or confirmable evidence of cougars in the listed states—carcasses, photographs that can be ground-truthed, tracks that can be identified as cougar by experts, characteristic kills of deer, scats confirmed by DNA analysis, etc. The other address is for sightings and “stories.” However, Dr. McCollough does not have the staff or time to evaluate sightings without evidence. If you do not do email, you can snail mail evidence to Dr. McCollough, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maine Field Office, 1168 Main Street, Old Town, Maine 04468.

March 30th is the deadline for submissions. McCollough is on a tight schedule. He says, "The Service announced our intent to complete a review in the FY07 fiscal year, which ends September 30, 2007. I have to have a draft ready for review in our regional office by August, 2007. Given this ambitious time line, it is unlikely that we will be drawing this out."

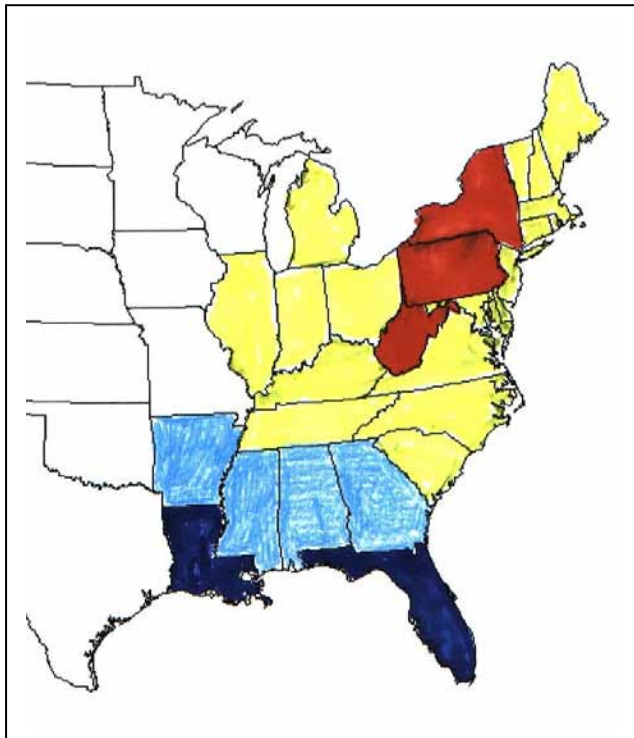


Second female.

The review was posted in the Federal Register on January 29th. The notice explains that delisting is one option. The announcement says, “Delisting a species must be supported by the best scientific and commercial data available and only considered if such data substantiates that the species is neither endangered nor threatened for one or more of the following reasons: (1) The species is considered extinct; (2) the species is considered to be recovered; and/or (3) the original data available when the species was listed, or the interpretation of such data, were in error.”

Outdated Taxonomy: The assumption that a separate subspecies of cougar existed in eastern North America is based on a study by Edward A. Goldman, published in 1946 in *THE PUMA: MYSTERIOUS AMERICAN CAT*, a book he co-authored with Stanley P. Young. At that time, he had 8 specimens available east-central North America: 7 skulls from New York, Pennsylvania and West Virginia and one “skin only” from New York. He decided that these were “eastern cougars,” *Puma concolor cougar*.

The only other specimens Goldman had from the East were 14 specimens from Florida and three from Louisiana. He noted that the southern specimens tended to have distinctive inflated nasal bones, giving the animals a “Roman-nosed” appearance. These he designated as Florida panthers, *Puma concolor coryi*.



Modern taxonomists (students of the classification of living things) know that such a small sample from the east-central North America is inadequate to designate a subspecies. In fact, subspecies are not in favor today for large carnivores because we know that subadult cougars and wolves can disperse hundreds of miles from their birthplace, assuring that their genes are widely dispersed. The boundary between the two assumed subspecies has shifted north and south on various maps published by various taxonomists and agencies; it is completely arbitrary. So how did the eastern cougar come to be listed as an endangered species?

Dr. Ronald Nowak used to work on endangered species in the Service. He says, “In those days, before passage of the new Endangered Species Act in December 1973,

Assumed former ranges of the eastern cougar (*Puma concolor cougar*) and the Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*). Available specimens in 1946: *cougar*: yellow, no specimens, orange—total of 8 specimens. *Coryi*-light blue, no specimens; black, specimens available (3 from Louisiana and 14 from Florida).

listings were very simple, involving little more than published notification that such was being done. Regardless of what one thinks of the taxonomy, the fact that the eastern cougar was regarded as a named subspecies allowed it to be formally listed.”

DNA Evidence: The publication of Dr. Melanie Culver’s study of the DNA of cougars throughout their range, from the southern tip of South America to the Yukon, has changed our concept of cougar classification. Culver determined that there is only one “subspecies” (or phylogeographic unit, as she preferred to call it) in all of North America. Five additional

“subspecies” were identified in Central and South America. Early taxonomists had identified at least 30 subspecies; Culver has reduced the list to six.

The new DNA evidence has put the state wildlife agencies in an impossible situation. They are responsible for protecting “eastern cougars” in their respective states. But how can they identify such a cougar? If DNA analysis showed that a cougar killed in an eastern state was one of the five Latin American “subspecies,” they could conclude that it is not an eastern cougar. But if it



First female sitting on haunches.

was North American and showed no clear evidence of former captivity, such as being declawed, then it could be descended from the original native population, a recent immigrant from the central US or eastern Canada, or a former captive that escaped or was deliberately released into the wild. Since 1973, no cougars have been shot in an eastern state outside of Florida, so the state agencies have been spared the decision of whether they should prosecute the killer for taking an endangered “eastern cougar.”

Populations: DNA analysis (and other techniques, such as immunity to viruses) can sometimes subdivide subspecies into populations. Dr. Culver believes that the Florida panther is a distinct population and qualify for protection under the current ESA as a Distinct Population Segment. But so few specimens of “eastern cougars” are available that it would be impossible to say if there ever was a distinct population. Distinct populations arise when animals are isolated by geographic or man-made barriers. There do not appear to be any such barriers to dispersal in historic eastern North America. The Florida panther has isolated by human activities

Delisting Likely? Delisting means that the “eastern cougar” would no longer be protected by the federal government under the provisions of the ESA. Kieran Suckling is the Policy Director of the Center for Biological Diversity and an endangered species expert. He says that since the “eastern cougar” is genetically identical to other cougars in the US, “it’s virtually certain that USFWS will delist. I don’t see a way to stop them. So, it looks like the future of cougar conservation in the East will come down to the states.” If the Service does decide to delist, there will be public hearings before a final rule is made. It is unlikely, Dr. McCollough says, that the Service will allow any eastern state to declare “open season” on cougars that currently live within their borders or arrive in the future on their own four paws. A delisting decision would clarify the unworkable system now in the East, and will likely change the modus operandi of eastern cougar advocates.

THE INDIANA “EXPERIMENT” CONTINUES

In the previous issue of this newsletter we told the story of Donner, an eight-year-old female cougar, born in the wild and rescued as a kitten when her mother was killed by a poacher in Montana. She and her brother Boomer ended up at the Exotic Feline Rescue Center in Center Point, western Indiana. She lived there in a compound on the 102-acre property for seven years, but never trusted people. She would hide when a keeper brought food, waiting until she left to feed. On January 5th Boomer escaped from her 14-foot high pen. As of March 9th, she has managed to evade the government trapper and remains on the property, which is predominantly wooded. Shortly after her escape, she killed at least one raccoon, but now she is being fed, so this isn't quite an unplanned experiment involving the release of cougar into the wild to determine if it could survive undetected by humans and avoid being killed on a nearby highway, but it is close.

RISK AND REALITY OF COUGAR ATTACKS

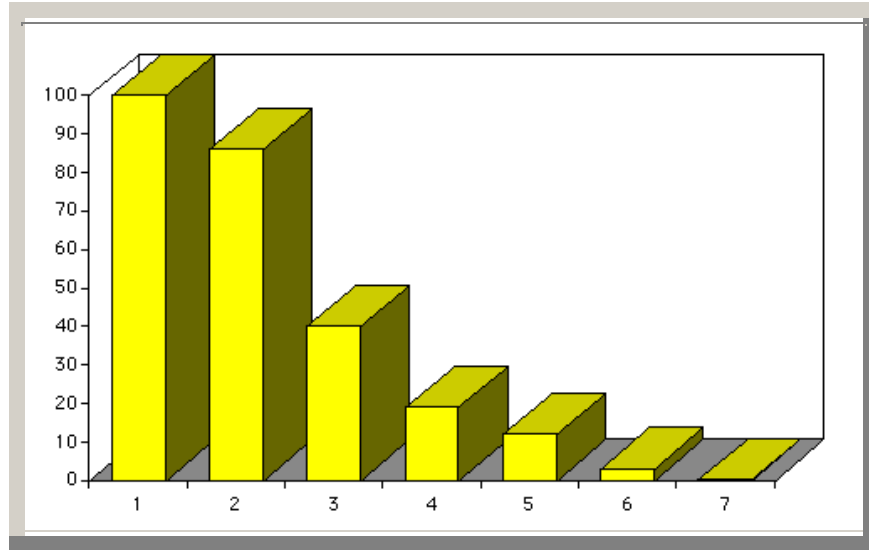
On January 24th 70-year-old Jim Hamm and his wife Nell were on a hike in Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park in northwestern California. A cougar unexpectedly jumped him from behind, knocking him down, ripping off a 6 X 8-inch piece of his scalp and leaving claw marks over his body. His wife Nell, age 65, knew just what to do. She found a 4-inch diameter branch and beat on the cat, but it would not let go. Then she jabbed a pen from her husband's pocket into the it's eye. Still it hung on. So then she slammed the cat on the snout with the branch. Finally the cat then let go. Nell started screaming, and the cat left. She did not want to leave Jim alone, subject to further attack, so she walked a quarter mile with him back to the road, where help was obtained. Hamm had to go into intensive care after surgery to repair his severely damaged scalp, but he was removed from critical care on February 29th and presumably is back home by now.

According to the Mountain Lion Foundation, Nell did everything right in her response to the attack. She attacked the cat aggressively with whatever was on hand. She screamed. Screaming is much more effective in driving off an attacking cougar than gun shots.

After the attack, a houndsman was brought in. Two cougars, thought to be siblings, were killed, a male and an 83-lb female. Human flesh under the female's claws showed she was the attacker.

The attack was the 16th recorded attack in California since 1890. Six people have died. Considering the millions of California residents who are out-of-doors every day, the risk of a cougar attack is infinitesimally small. It's been pointed out that a Californian has a much better chance of winning the state lottery than being attacked by a cougar.

But here in the East, some people react with fear at the very thought that a cougar might roam the woods in their state. What is the actual risk of a cougar attack in the West in comparison to other outdoor hazards? The graph was developed by the Effie Yeaw Nature Center in Carmichael, California and is reproduced with the permission of Marilee Flannery. <http://virtual-markets.net/vme/ARNHA/graph3.html>



1. 100 human deaths in auto collisions with deer (130 in 1989 alone).
2. 86 deaths due to lightning strikes.
3. 40 deaths due to bee stings.
4. 18-20 people killed by dogs (also inflict suture-requiring injuries on 200,000 people).
5. 12 human deaths resulting from 5,000 rattlesnake bites.
6. 3 deaths due to bites of black widow spider.
7. **0.33 fatal mountain lions attacks, or one fatal attack every three years** (this even includes attacks in Canada).



Eastern Cougar Foundation Officers:

President: Todd Lester, PO Box 91, North Spring, WV 24869;
scb01489@mail.wvnet.edu

Vice President: Kerry Gyekis, 1191 Hurley Hill Rd., Morris, PA 16938;
gyekis@epix.net

Treasurer: Judy Tipton, PO Box 1285, Shelbyville, KY 40066;
jlt12@earthlink.net

Newsletter Editor: Helen McGinnis, PO Box 300, Harman, WV 26270;
helenmcginnis@frontiernet.net

Become a Member of ECF

Send your \$15.00 dues (\$5.00 for students) to Judy Tipton, Treasurer, PO Box 1285, Shelbyville, KY 40066-1285. Write checks to the Eastern Cougar Foundation. Please include your email address. Let us know if you'd prefer your newsletters emailed or snail mailed. Typical newsletters occupy about 1 MB of computer space.

First female walking.

Eastern Cougar Foundation
PO Box 91
North Spring, WV 24869