

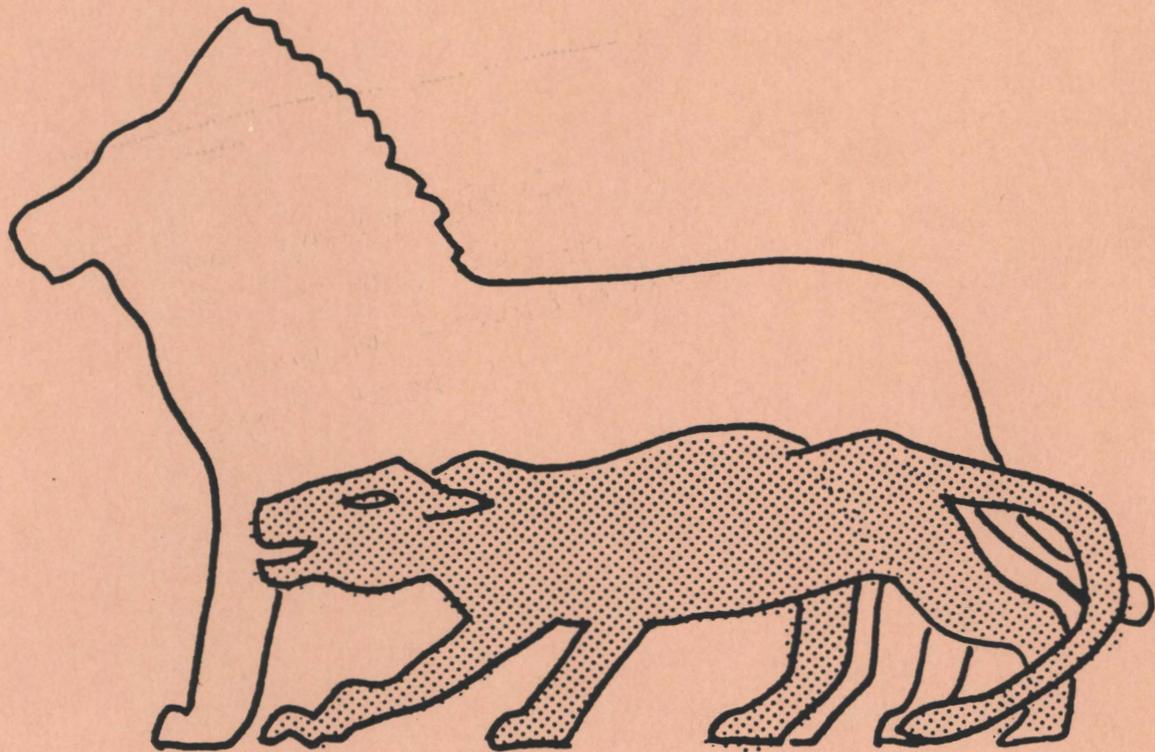
WONDERS

Seeking the Truth in a Universe of Mysteries

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The American Lion



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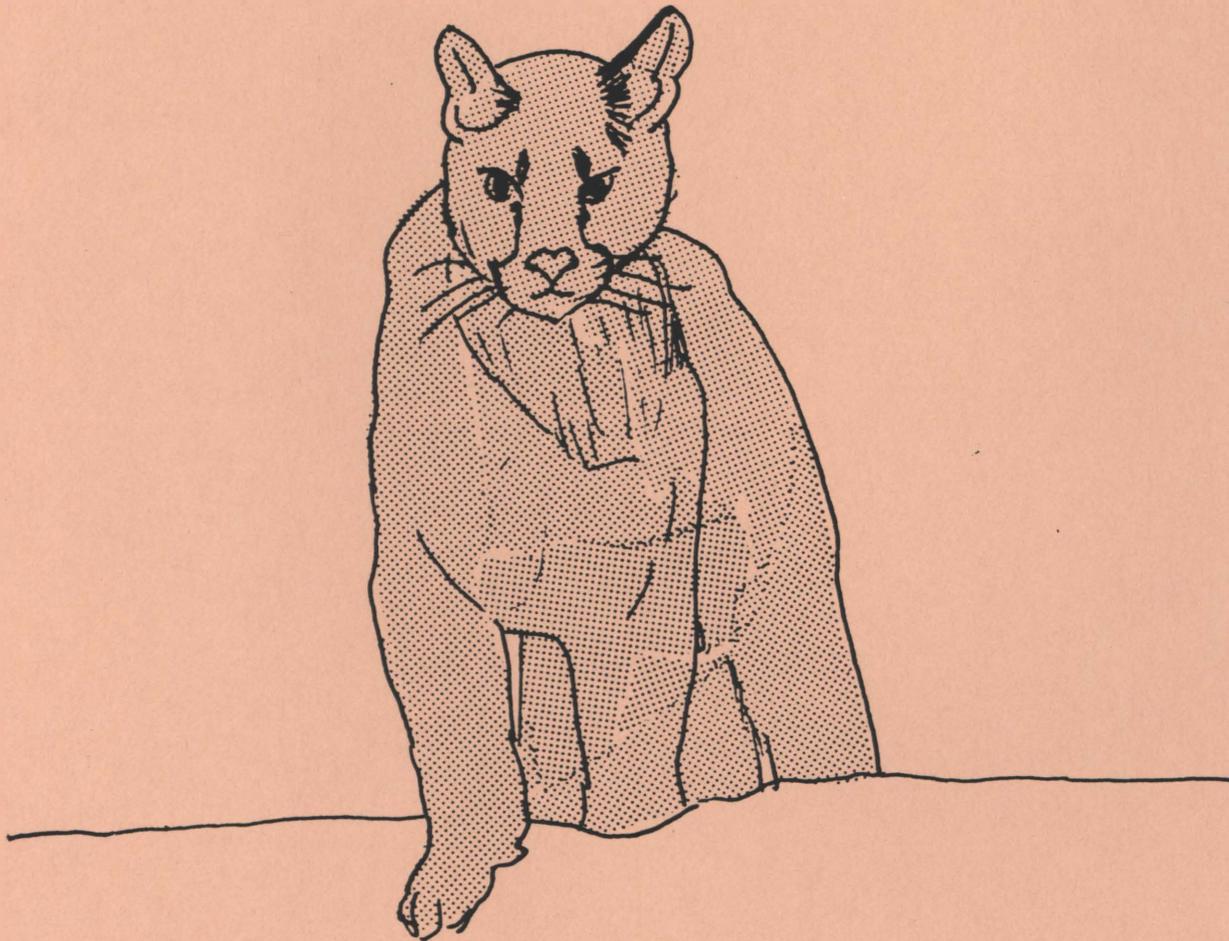
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THE AMERICAN LION (*Panthera atrox*)

by Mark A. Hall

Recent history shows us that people in North America have been seeing what they describe as "black panthers" or "big black cats" throughout the continent. At the same time people have reported maned cats. These maned cats are reported less frequently but they show a similar distribution of reports. The second group is often compared to the African lion (*Panthera leo*). For its similarity it has been sometimes called a "TV lion" because North Americans are accustomed to seeing such a cat on television or in zoos.

So numerous are these accounts that no numbers of introduced African lions or "black panthers" from Asia would reasonably account for them. As will be considered later, other candidates such as melanistic cougars, feral cats formerly domesticated, and local fauna (jaguars, bobcats) cannot explain away these animals. Further, prior to recent decades there are historical references that hint at an antiquity for the presence of the maned and black cats as native to the continent.

They can be explained, in my view, by the survival of *Panthera atrox*, a large Pleistocene cat. The males have manes and the females are the smaller and more active predators we call "black panthers."

During the recent Pleistocene Epoch these cats along with *Arctodus*, a giant bear, were some of the "superpredators" that fed on the large fauna of the period. M.R. Voorhies and R. George Corner described the cat this way:

Panthera atrox, which literally means "horrible panther," is the scientific name applied to one of the largest cats that ever lived, certainly the largest one in the Western Hemisphere. Although *Panthera atrox*, or the American lion, probably resembled the African lion (*Panthera leo*) in outward appearance, the fossil form was about 20 percent larger. The relatively long, slender limbs of the American lion indicate that it was adapted for life on the grasslands where it could pursue such prey as horses, camels, bison, prongbucks, caribou, ground sloths, and perhaps immature mammoths. The species is very widespread in American Late Pleistocene deposits but is notably absent in the eastern and southeastern United States....[1]

The Pleistocene fauna and the landscape of that era are now gone. Modern reports indicate that the American lion is now dispersed across the continent of North America. If they in fact once lived in prides as do the lions of Africa today, they have had to adapt to a world that offers them marginal habitat and scarcer resources.

Fossil remains of the American lion have turned up in "Alaska, the Yukon, western and southwestern United States, Nebraska, Kansas, Texas, Mexico, and even as far south as Peru." [2] A very few reports of unusual cats south of the U.S.A. border do hint that we might still find *Panthera atrox* in parts of Latin America today.

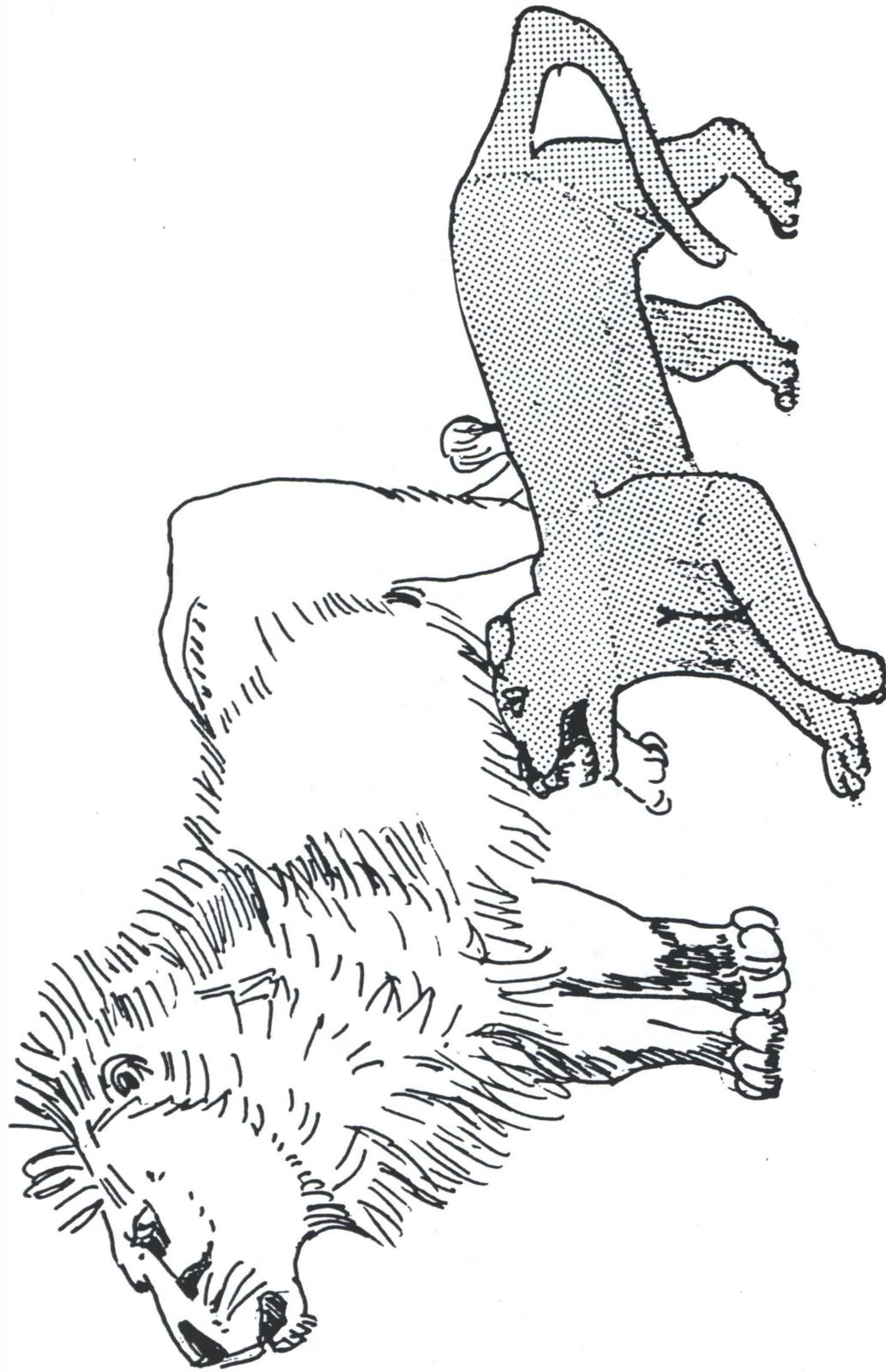


Fig. 1. Very large cats resembling African lions have been seen in North America along with smaller "black panthers." They may represent survivors of the cat species *Panthera atrox*.

Knowledge of "black panthers" and their seldom-seen companions, large maned cats, is found most often in newspaper articles. The animals create a sensation for a few days usually when they are glimpsed and hunted after conspicuously preying on livestock and people's pets. Sometimes they turn up in folklore journals after a particular splash of publicity gives them a monicker such as "the Beast of Bladenboro." Also they are mentioned offhandedly to journalists by conservation specialists who hear about them but don't know what to make of such stories of big black cats and "TV lions" where none should be.

The prospect of released pets or escaped circus animals is often raised but with little evidence to support such origins. When animals escape from captivity they are identified as escapees and tracked down unless they expire in unsuitable surroundings. The folklore of people turning pets loose seems to me to have grown largely out of a situation where numerous unknown animals such as *P. atrox* remain uncatalogued. It is assumed that the animals just have to be pets.

Figures 2 and 3 map a representative sample of reports of American lions in the U.S.A. and Canada. A bias toward the eastern half of the continent is likely because the research has been done mostly by myself and Loren E. Coleman in that area. For example, in 1970 I happened to research the files of the Richmond, Indiana, **Palladium-Item and Sun-Telegram**. That effort brought to light many cat reports from Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio.

The western half of the U.S.A. has seen little research for black and maned cats. A few incidents mostly around major metropolitan areas have been noticed so far. If publicity were given to the value of these kinds of reports more information might be forthcoming.

The reports shown in Fig. 2 are not the only ones. Most states in the eastern half of the continent have them. I have them as well for Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Alabama. In an unpublished paper on "Reports of Cougars in Pennsylvania since 1890" Helen McGinnis was able to cite over 40 reports of black panthers in Pennsylvania alone.[3] In addition, incidents of these cats are sometimes implied by the nature of reported predatory acts where no direct observation of the animals was reported. The reports of black and maned cats have continued throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

The oldest reference to these cats may be one noted by Henry Shoemaker in his **Juniata Memories** when describing the big cats known in central Pennsylvania:

On very rare occasions panthers with manes were taken; one of the last such was killed in the Bald Eagle Mountains by the celebrated frontiersman, Peter Pentz, in 1797.[4]

From the state of Maine the following intelligence was reported by the **Bangor Courier** in 1836:

The forests of Maine still abound in numerous species of wild animals, such as the moose, deer, caribou, loup cervier, lunkasoose, and many others -- most of them valuable for food and for their skins. The lunkasoose (the orthography is arbitrary)



Fig. 2. Eastern reports of Black Panthers and Maned Cats

KEY TO FIG. 2. EASTERN REPORTS OF BLACK PANTHERS AND MANED CATS
(Asterisks denote maned cat reports)

1. 1929 Homestead FL / "Florida Mammals," NATURE, Dec 1929
2. 1948 Wilton NH / C.B.Colby, MYSTERIOUS NEW ENGLAND (1971)
3. 1948 Pittsfield MA / C.B.Colby, MYSTERIOUS NEW ENGLAND (1971)
- 4.* 1948 Indiana-Ohio / Richmond Palladium-Item 3 Aug-5 Sep 1948
5. 1948 Owen Co. IN / Richmond Palladium-Item 17 Aug 1948
6. 1949 Jasper Co. IL / Richmond Palladium-Item 1 Sep 1949
7. 1951 Hamilton Co. IN / Richmond Palladium-Item 8 Jan 1951
8. 1952 Oakland Co. MI / Detroit News 15 Jul 1986
9. 1953-54 Bladenboro NC / NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE Aug 1976
10. 1955 New Brunswick / B.Wright, THE EASTERN PANTHER, p.123
11. 1956 Oakland Co. MI / Detroit News 15 Jul 1986
12. 1957 Mountainside NJ / NY Journal-American, 17 Jan 1957
13. 1957 Chillicothe MO / Kansas City (MO) Times 23 July 1957
14. 1958 Cedartown GA / Atlanta Constitution 15, 18 Apr 1958
- 15.* 1958 Warrick Co. IN / Indianapolis News 25-29 Jan 1958
16. 1959 Sudbury ONT / Toronto Star 21 Aug 1959
17. 1960 Southfield MI / Detroit News 15 Jul 1986
- 18.* 1960 Kapuskasing ONT / Toronto Telegram 28 Jun 1960
19. 1961 New Brunswick / B.Wright, THE EASTERN PANTHER, p.123
20. 1962 Montgomery, Clark Cos. OH / Springfield News 27 Jun 1973
21. 1962 Delhi NY / Walton Reporter 28 July 1982
22. 1962 Hancock Co. IN / Indianapolis News 2 Oct 1962
23. 1963 Champaign Co. IL / Champaign-Urbana Courier 4 Jan 1963
24. 1963 Dupage Co. IL / Joliet Herald News 24 Apr 1963
25. 1965 Macon Co. IL / Decatur Review 25 Jun, 1 Jul 1965
26. 1966 Alexander Co. IL / Carbondale Egyptian 22 Apr 1966
27. 1968 Greene Co. AR / Arkansas Democrat 25 Sep 1968
28. 1970 Fredericton NB / B.Wright, THE EASTERN PANTHER, 122,158
29. 1970 Macon Co. IL / Decatur Review 10 Jan 1970 and interview
30. 1970 Jasper Co. IL / Newton Press 19 Feb 1970
- 31.* 1970 Roscoe IL / Rockford Star 30 May, 2 Jun, 25 Aug 1970
32. 1970 Randolph, Union Cos. IL / Southern Illinoisan 11 Jun 1970
33. pre-1971 Flintstone MD / Washington Post 26 Aug 1971
34. 1971 Eaton Corners NY / Knickerbocker News (Schenectady)
29 Mar 1971
- 35.* 1971 North Brunswick NJ / S.Woodbridge News Trib 11 Sep 1971
36. 1972 Fayetteville AR / Northwest Arkansas Times 16 Dec 1972
37. 1974 Monroe MI / Detroit News 15 Jul 1986
38. 1974 Southfield MI / Detroit News 11, 12 Oct 1974
39. 1975 Stockbridge GA / Atlanta Constitution 18 Sep 1975
- 40.* 1975 Geauga Co. OH / Cleveland Plain Dealer 5 Sep 1975
41. 1976 St. Clair Co. IL / Millstadt Enterprise 21 Apr 1976
42. 1976 Little Rock AR / Arkansas Gazette 17 Nov 1976
- 43.* 1976 Alapaha GA / Atlanta Journal 2 Aug 1979
44. 1977 Allen Co. OH / L.E. Coleman FATE Magazine Nov 1977
45. 1978 Council Bluffs IA / Nonpareil 23-30 Jun 1978
46. 1978 Pt. Pleasant WV / Pt Pleasant Register 18,20,21 Sep 1978
47. pre-1979 Cleveland Co. NC / Shelby Star 15 Jan 1979
48. 1980 Russelville AR / Courier Democrat 24-25 Jan 1980
49. 1980 Lone Jack MO / Kansas City Star 4 Feb 1980
50. 1981 nr Baxter State Pk ME / Augusta Kennebec Jour. 6 May 1981
51. 1984 to 1987 Oakland, Washtenaw, Livingston Cos. MI / Detroit
Free Press 13 Sep 1984 +, Detroit News 12 Jul 1986 +
52. 1984 Flint MI / Flint Journal 14 Aug 1984, 4 Dec 1984



Fig. 3. Western reports of Black Panthers and Maned Cats

KEY TO FIG. 3. WESTERN REPORTS OF BLACK PANTHERS AND MANED CATS
(Asterisks denote maned cat reports)

- 1.* 1951 Waterloo NE / New York Times 29 Nov 1951
- 2.* 1954 Surprise NE / Omaha World Herald 2 Aug 1954
3. 1960 Fort Worth TX / interview with Sallie Ann Clarke,
April 1970
4. 1964 Mill Valley CA / San Rafael Independent-Journal
14 Sep 1964
5. 1967 Camarillo CA / Ventura Star-Free Press 13 Dec 1967
6. 1968 Thousand Oaks CA / Ventura Star-Free Press 9 Jan 1968
7. 1973 Concord to Danville CA / Vallejo Times-Herald 5 Mar
1973
8. 1973 Alum Rock (east of San Jose) CA / AP, 16 Dec 1973
9. 1975 Nobility TX / Sherman Democrat 22 May 1975
10. pre-1976 Big Thicket TX / Corpus Christi Caller 8 Feb
1976
11. 1976 Tucson AZ / Tucson Citizen 17 Sep-27 Oct 1976
12. 1977 Talihina OK / Talihina American 20 Jan 1977
13. 1977 Oklahoma City OK / Oklahoma Times 25-26 Oct 1977
Oklahoman 26-27 Oct 1977
- 14.* 1979 Fremont CA / Fremont Argus 11-17 Nov 1979,
San Francisco Chronicle 13 Nov 1979
- 15.* 1983 El Toro CA / UPI 9 Oct 1983
16. 1984 San Dimas CA / San Gabriel Valley Tribune 21 May 1984
- 17.* 1985 Fort Worth TX / Fort Worth Star Telegram 21-22 Feb
1985, UPI 21-22 Feb 1985
18. 1988 Fairfield CA / UPI 10 Apr 1988

is an animal of which we have only heard recently; but tradition says that a ferocious animal of huge size, with a mane like a lion, has actually been seen to come to the borders of the river, and the lumbermen say that they have heard him in the woods roaring most lustily. The Indians, too, talk about the "lunkasoose," and they are conclusive authority in such matters.[5]

The characteristics of the **lunkasoose** in size, mane, and roar are repeated in modern accounts of what seem to be **P. atrox**. We might have hoped for a better traditional name for this cat than "lunkasoose." So far this is the only such name that might replace the ambiguous names currently applied to **P. atrox** (those names being "American lion," "giant jaguar," "black panther," and "TV lion.")

Another early reflection of these cats may be "A Tiger in Kentucky" reported in the Lexington (Kentucky) **Gazette** for 17 July 1823. The report began:

We learn from Russellville that a gentleman discovered an animal of alarming appearance a few miles from town, and hastened to the nearest house where he was joined by three men, two of whom were armed with guns, and attended by a dog. The strange monster was again discovered, and while bayed by the dog, the two guns continued to fire on him at a distance of about fifty yards without forcing him to move from his stand; a furious look and appalling brow the two men without guns who fled to town. Experienced marksmen, continued to fire, and on the twelfth shot

the beast put off at full speed, marking his way by blood flowing from many wounds that it must have received. The dog was too much frightened to continue the pursuit, and the huntsmen dare not venture, although one of them was as fearless as Boone himself, and accustomed to the chase from early life.

When the news reached Russellville about forty gentlemen repaired to the spot, and had a full view of the ground. The print which the paws of this animal made in the earth corresponds with the account given of his great bulk by those who had an opportunity of viewing him at a short distance for several minutes; he was of a brindle color with a most terrific front -- his eyes are described as the largest ever seen in any animal. We are well acquainted with the party engaged in the attack, and give the fullest credit to the account we have received.[6]

The Kentucky monster hunt of 1823 has been followed by many more hunts for big cats in the twentieth century. The states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio have seen many of them. I found such "varmint hunts" to be numerous in the files of the Richmond (Indiana) **Palladium-Item and Sun-Telegram** when I did research there in 1970.

A remarkable series of reports from southern Indiana and nearby Ohio in August and September of 1948 demonstrates the presence there of a pair of cats. The news reports told of a maned cat accompanied by a black cat.

An animal was treed and fired upon on 2 August in Union County in Indiana. It leapt from tree to tree and escaped. The next day tracks six inches long were found. The **Palladium-Item** observed: "Such tracks are not those of any of the wild life living in this section of the country." Hogs, cattle, and a bull were reported lost to some predator.[7]

On 5 August a cat appeared at Elkhorn Falls in Wayne County. Six people fishing there were frightened. The next day the **Palladium-Item** wrote: "The people were reported to have described the animal as looking like a lion with a long tail, bushy hair around the neck and other similar features."

On 7 August it became clear that these reports reflected the presence of two animals. Two teen-age boys, Arthur and Howard Turner, saw the two approach the buildings on their family's farm. Due to the "varmint" scare in progress, Arthur was carrying a rifle. He fired in their direction when they were 200 feet away. The animals jumped a gate and ran away. The paper reported:

The two boys described one of the animals as "having the appearance of a lion." It was large-headed and shaggy and appeared to be brownish in color. The other, they said, had more the appearance of a panther and was black.

Later the cats were seen further to the north and east into Ohio in Drake County. Later still, in early September, unusual tracks were found to the south near Morning Sun, Ohio. The reports suggest the movement of the pair from the south around the Ohio River to the north along the Whitewater River. Their path was a U-shaped journey, returning them southward toward the Ohio River.

In 1977 Allen County in Ohio was the scene of numerous depredations by a "black panther." Loren Coleman has summarized these events.[8] The episode produced a photograph of track (Fig.4) that matches the reported tracks and photographed casts that have turned up during panther reports elsewhere. The track will be discussed later.

Typical of modern panther accounts is an experience outside Baxter State Park in Maine in 1981. The wife of a park ranger, Betty Ann Cushman, told her sighting this way:

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that what I saw was a black panther. We were driving between Harrington Lake and the Sourdnaunk gate when this handsome animal appeared in the road. It had the wide head of the cat family, the long tail, and its every motion was one of grace. It took a long look at the truck, then seemed to glide over the road bank and into the woods.[9]

The presence of a surviving *Panthera atrox* south of the U.S.A. border is suggested by a few reports. One observer of a black panther in the Mexican state of Sinaloa was David L. Young. He reported the following story in a letter to the Tucson Citizen in 1976.

In 1941 Bill Blake and I, driving a pickup truck, made a trip down the west coast of Mexico from Nogales to Guadalajara. This was long before there were bridges over the rivers or pavement to drive on.

At sunup one morning we were quietly coasting down a narrow sandy road in the mist-coated foothills of Sinaloa and upon making a sharp turn in the road we saw not far ahead, belly to the ground, tail twitching in stalking position, a large black member of the cat family. The animal was reluctant to give up as we got quite near it before it leaped in the roadside wall of green. Curiosity caused us to stop and look over the embankment and there, dipping water from a waterhole, was a Mexican woman and young child.

We felt sure we had seen a black panther, but careful research after returning to Tucson taught us there are no black panthers in Mexico, only an occasional dark-colored jaguar.[10]

Also from western Mexico comes another indication of large cats with manes in 1940. Ivan T. Sanderson told me of his collecting a cat skin that he described as over 6 feet long from nose to tail. The tail, he recalled, was about 18 inches long. He continued:

The legs appeared to have been rather long compared to, say, a house-cat or a puma. The paws were very big and splayed and well furred. The claws were bright yellow. The fur was soft below and rather firm on top and basically was various browns throughout, plain on the head and shoulders but breaking up into light and dark sort of wavy stripes on the flanks and upper legs.

The most singular feature of the skin was "a large ruff around the neck" formed by hairs growing forward from behind the shoulders.

This specimen was subsequently ruined in a hurricane that struck British Honduras (Belize) where his collection was stored. When in 1972 Ivan told me of this experience I asked him to write it down. A summary of this recollection was published posthumously.[11]

In a 19th century description of Guatemala vulcanologist William Brigham recalled this event:

An earthquake in 1526, so severe, says Bernal Diaz del Castillo, that men could not stand, seems to have frightened the population less than did an enormous lion (puma?) which descended the forest-clad slopes of [the volcano] Agua in 1532 and made great havoc, until a reward of twenty-five gold dollars and a hundred fanegas of wheat induced a peasant to kill the monster.[12]

Might this "enormous lion" have been *P. atrox*?

In 1983 an American rancher with property in Honduras, Temistocles Ramirez de Arellano, was protesting the appropriation of some of his land near Puerto Castilla. The U.S. Army wanted to build a Honduran base there. His protest included a concern for "rare black panthers" that were part of what he considered a game preserve on the land.[13]

The latest suggestion of *P. atrox* comes from Peter Hocking in Peru. He has heard of a "giant black panther" and a more seldom-seen striped cat of large size in Peruvian forests.[14]

Historical references to black types of cats in South America are cited in Stanley Young and Edward Goldman's book *The Puma*. [15] Such references might only be safely sorted out from jaguars and "black pumas" only after the presence of *P. atrox* is established on other grounds.

Latin America has not truly been surveyed by research or direct inquiry to reveal what might be learned of maned and unusual black cats in the region. Such an effort should be made.

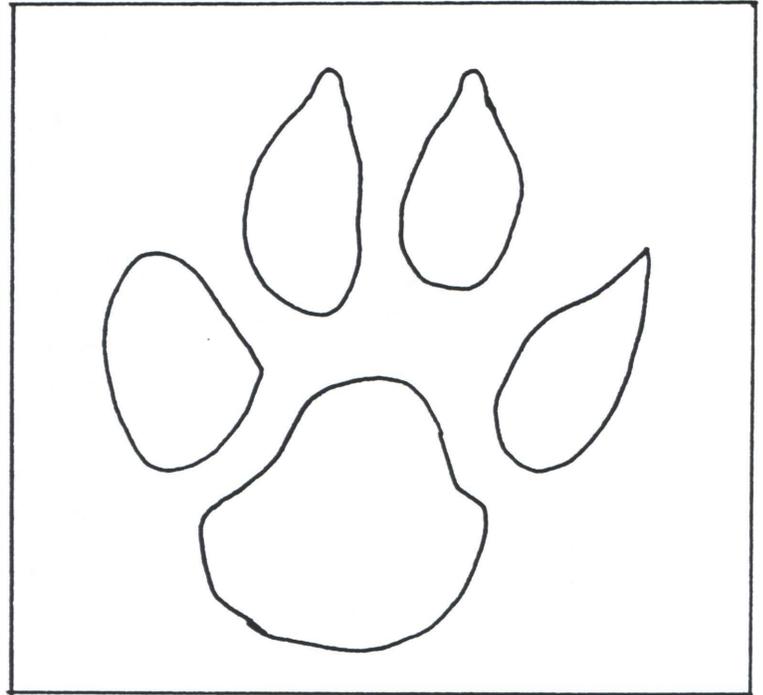
When these cats are so widely seen in North America some dead cats should have turned up over time. I know of three instances of "black panthers" being killed in recent years. None of them was then examined to determine their biological identity, however.

In the early 1970's Walter DeYoung was living on his farm near Bemidji, Minnesota. One night he saw a long black cat in his corral and he watched it leap the fence. He thought it must be a puma. So did the local conservation officer he talked to who already knew about the cat. He asked DeYoung not to talk about it. The cat was seen for about 3 months until a local paper ran a picture of the dead cat after it had been shot.

A second occurrence appears to have happened in early 1960. Sallie Ann Clarke of Fort Worth, Texas, told me in 1970 that a "black panther" had been routinely seen along a creek beside her new home. Finally a farmer shot and killed the animal according to a newspaper report.

The most involved incident is documented in Atlanta, Georgia, newspapers for the year 1975. The story began with an 18 Sept. report from Stockbridge with the title "Something Screams at Night." From the woods came sounds "that'll turn your blood cold." People reported a "sleek black cat with a long tail" and eyes the size of silver dollars. A penned-up goat was killed.

Fig. 4. The track of a "black panther." The track has been dismissed often as a dog track because the claws are not retracted. This one was found near Bluffton, Ohio, in 1977. Measurements are 5 inches long and 4.5 inches wide. From a photograph in the Bluffton News, 9 June 1977.



Three days later it was reported that five residents around Stockbridge had seen the same black cat. A trap was put out by officials of the Game and Fish Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. At this time it surfaced that a local resident, James Rutledge, had shot and killed an animal during the previous spring. He was plowing in his garden when he spied what looked like a young black panther in a tree. He shot it three times. According to the Atlanta Constitution "he said he buried it without telling anyone because he was afraid of upsetting local residents."

At this point officials gave their views on black panthers. Dr. Ernest Provost of the University of Georgia (Forest Resources Dept.) said, "There may be panthers here but they are not black. This black business has never been proven. No one has ever gotten a black panther." Ron Jackson, curator of mammals at the Atlanta Zoo, said a black panther was not a biological impossibility but no zoo had one. If reports were correct he thought it would have to be a leopard, saying, "As far as I know there would be nothing like that unless someone released it. It's possible that some circus had it and it escaped."

Terry Johnson, a biologist with the state DNR, wanted to dig up any skeletal remains of Rutledge's kill. And it was reported that this would happen within a week's time.

On 6 Oct. the Atlanta Journal reported the outcome of the interest in the corpse. Rutledge decided against revealing the location. He told the DNR that he could not remember where it was. According to the Journal: "Rutledge is reportedly afraid of being prosecuted for killing an endangered species, which carries a maximum fine of \$20,000 and two to five years in jail." An unnamed U.S. official was reported to say that such prosecution was unlikely. The newspaper concluded "apparently Rutledge will not lead officials to the site unless he has a written document granting immunity from prosecution, a document that officials say they cannot legally provide." [16]

The true distribution of the cats in the Americas is uncertain and a more methodical survey of the continents is needed. In North America they have been reported from Tacoma, Washington[17] to southern Florida. The numerous appearances in states south of the Great Lakes seem less extraordinary when we consider the recent decimation of the Great Swamps in those states.[18] Those wetlands supported such wildlife as bison and elk.[19] The big cats may have preyed upon those animals in a post-Pleistocene world. They have simply remained in place and taken to surviving as best they can in the new conditions this century has left them where the swamps were.

When using the African lion as a model for the prehistoric behavior of the American lion we should note the findings of George and Kay Schaller who studied *Panthera leo* in the wild.[20] The cats do not survive exclusively in prides. Individuals spend time off by themselves. Assuming such experience for American lions, the cats may have found this ability the key to surviving beyond the demise of the Pleistocene fauna. A pattern of wandering is the likely one in today's world. They are in transition and live more like mountain lions.

They have turned from preying upon herds to scavenging. When black panthers are seen there are also reports of livestock lost. Instances of stealing food also occur, as at the Rock River in Illinois (told below). The cats probably stalk prey like deer where they can.

The tracks of the American lion could become one of the most distinguishing indicators of the cat's presence. More patient study of them is needed because they have so far been loosely described and often wrongly dismissed as dog tracks.

The tracks of the male lion can be enormous if the reports are accurate. They are frequently compared to dinner plates. But consistently they have remained poorly recorded.

The tracks of the female have been seen often, photographed, and casted, perhaps because they are much smaller. The example in Fig.4 is typical. The track has a diamond-shaped configuration with four toes and claws apparent. Because the claws show consistently the track has been repeatedly dismissed as a "dog track" in the modern history of black panther reports. No consideration was given to the possibility that a large cat with non-retractable claws could be leaving the prints.

Most but not all cats have fully-retractable claws. The Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*), for example, has claw sheaths that are not large enough to fully conceal the cat's claws.[21] Naturalist Jim Corbett has pointed out that "the imprint of the toe-nails shows in the tracks of all animals that run down their prey." [22] So we may expect that the American lion was such a cat during the Pleistocene.

Little can be said for certain about the colors of the two sexes except that black specimens appear to be females while the large cats with manes seem to be brownish and are the males. There are reasons to suspect both sexes may show some striping as well. The skin described by Ivan Sanderson was probably a male and showed some stripes. A report of a black panther in my files contains a claim by the observer that he saw evidence of stripes on the dark body of the cat. All of this raises the possibility that the animals we see

today are showing less and less of the stripes that may have been more common thousands of years ago. Perhaps an all black body is currently a better adaptation for survival in the female lion. The true colors of males requires much better descriptions than we now have.

The incidents of maned cats are of particular interest for there is no argument that something extraordinary is being reported. Here are examples of three of them.

A pair of cats was indicated along the Rock River in northern Illinois in May of 1970. Six people loading sod on a truck 2 miles east of Roscoe saw a lion run off with a bag of meat put out for two stray dogs. Some of the people followed the cat in a car and got a better look. Tom Terry recounted: "He must have been 8 feet long. He had a mane and a long tail. It looked...well...like a regular lion." The animal jumped a fence and vanished.

In June tracks were found on the east of the river after several horses and calves were spooked. Tracks were found that measured 5 inches long and 4.75 inches wide. The distance between each paw print was 40 inches. Also found were tracks described as similar but smaller. In August a resident in the area reported a roar that was "like the lion they have in the Milwaukee Zoo." [23]

In 1976 near Alapaha, Georgia, J.H. Holyoak saw a large cat like none he had ever seen. He was an experienced hunter who had killed mountain lions in the West. The animal looked like a cross between an African lion and a cougar. It had a mane on its neck. It was trying to catch a calf. Holyoak wounded the cat with a shotgun but it escaped. [24]

In 1960 Leo Paul Dallaire, who lived on a farm near Kapuskasing, Ontario, reported seeing an animal **resembling** an African lion on his land. He described it as being: light tan, 5 feet long, with a large mane, and having a 4-foot tail that was "bushy at the end." Orrie Lewis, an Ontario wildlife officer, commented, "Mr. Dallaire has been watching too much TV." [25]

The possibility of real "black panthers" has not been well received. In the July/August 1992 issue of **Nature Conservancy** William Stolzenburg made mention of "black Florida panthers -- for which there is no scientific proof whatever." [26] Writing in 1983 Thomas Atkeson, an outdoors writer for the Huntsville (Alabama) **Times**, called black panthers a myth. He went on:

Theoretically, there could be a melanistic cougar, but mammalogists who have studied them for years say that, nature-faking fiction and television thrillers notwithstanding, there has never been a record of a black one in the United States. To those who are continually sighting black panthers, we can only say slack off on the bottle, boys, or it will be pink elephants next. [27]

When in 1980 Loren Coleman discussed the view that these cats are surviving American lions [28], he drew criticisms from Mike Grayson in a letter to the **Fortean Times**. His first complaint was that reports of "black panthers" come from various parts of the world, including Australia "where lions and panthers have **never** occurred." This reminds

me of a children's riddle: If butter is 99 cents a pound in Milwaukee, what are window panes in Detroit? The answer is "glass." Even children were expected to grasp the fact that two different commodities were involved. A hypothesis to explain cats in the Americas should not be criticized because it does not explain mysteries elsewhere in the world.

Next he complains that there are no prides of lions seen. He insists Americans are reporting animals with un-lion-like behavior. As noted above, I would say that the Schallers have described lion behavior that the American cats have used to adapt to the post-Pleistocene environment.

Next Grayson says that black pigmentation in one sex would be unique in the world. I say, so be it. Nature develops as it will and is not subject to laws we invent. We devise such things to help us understand nature, not to dictate what nature will do. As suggested earlier, the coloration of both sexes in the American lion may be in transition. Perhaps both animals will one day be equally dark.

Finally, he writes that "there are **no known** melanistic populations of lions." Again, one day we may have to put in an exception for new knowledge of the living American lions.

Regarding the last two points, our collective folly has been to avoid studying the struggling populations -- rare in numbers -- that are the cryptids of this world. We know only the nature of larger animal populations that are easily captured and studied.

Oddly these weak arguments from Grayson are seconded by Karl P.N. Shuker in his **Mystery Cats of the World**. [29] But they are no better for being repeated. Shuker offers his own answer for the cats' presence, escapees from circuses and private collections. My remarks on p.5 speak to this hypothesis. In addition to being unproven in any single instance among all the accounts cited here, the reports of large black cats and cats with manes are too numerous to be brushed aside. A multitude of careless and imaginary circuses and cat-owners would be a bigger mystery.

If mistaken views of black house cats (or feral cats that are still too small -- and sickly creatures as well) were sufficient to explain these cat reports I would have little to say about them. The tracks, the reported size, and the depredations all point to something exceeding domestic cats. Mistaken views of domestic cats can happen but that does not invalidate better reports and other data.

While historical records of "black pumas" exist, as cited in Tinsley, [30] I tend to agree with the conventional wisdom: melanism appears to be extremely rare among the cougars. We must wonder about "black pumas" that were simply assumed to cougars for lack of an alternative such as is suggested here.

The jaguar does little to explain the North American cat reports for its range barely reaches into the U.S.A.

The jaguarundi appears to have become established in Florida and Alabama in small numbers. If "black panther" reports were confined to areas where this was the case, again we would have little to discuss. We should be and are concerned about isolating jaguarundi accounts.

That the puma (**Felis concolor**) still occurs in the eastern states and provinces is true and is the subject of another article here. [31]

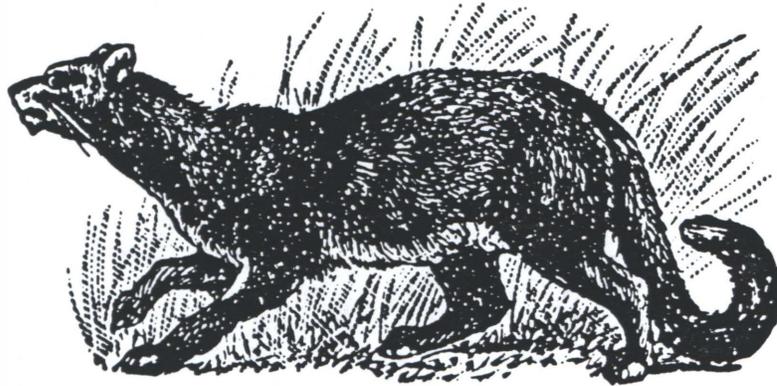


Fig. 5. The jaguarundi (*Herpailurus yagouarundi*) is a cat that averages 16 pounds in weight. It is distinguished by its long tail and can be gray in color. It lives in Arizona and southern Texas and is known southward into Brazil. It is thought to have established itself in Florida and Alabama in small numbers.

The puma is an animal with different tracks, different behavior, and different appearances than what we have seen reported for the American lion. The same can be said for the bobcat and other native cats.

Some people may want to suggest that a combination of the above candidates would explain away all the cat reports. Such convoluted arguments are not necessary if we pursue the survival of the American lion as just one more of many cryptozoological survivors.

These particular cat reports are explained by the presence of the American lion, *Panthera atrox*. They are large cats with marked sexual dimorphism. The males appear, as a rule, to be more retiring than the females. Their tracks are distinctive in size and characteristics. Their aggressive behavior and vocalizations are distinctively their own. (The screaming of pumas ought to be reconsidered with the understanding that other large cats are native to North America and have always been around, albeit in lesser numbers.) Both the great size and manes of the American lion have been reported. Their presence in the prehistory of the Americas is undoubted. All that is lacking is a careful record of the animal's presence. No organized resources have been brought to bear on the question of the survival of these lions.

I regret that describing the existence of the American lion is the equivalent of nailing up a wanted poster. An inevitable urge to shoot a specimen will follow in the minds of many. They will want to "prove its existence," to "make a million dollars" off the experience, to "show up the experts," or to "make history by being the first to bag a trophy." Personally I would not encourage any of these goals.

The first preserved specimen is unlikely to prove the existence of a modern distinct cat. It will be debated and some will dismiss it as an aberration -- one abnormal specimen -- of a known animal. Big money as a reward for killing such a creature remains an illusion. As for showing up the experts, those who would deny the possibility of these lions surviving will cling to their cherished illusions until they expire from this life. To paraphrase Max Planck, you don't change

their minds. They die off and a whole new generation grows up with the truth.

Several large black cats have already been shot, and fame has not come to the shooters. It is too late to be the first. The next shooter is as likely to be reviled as praised for the act. People will wonder how many animals were only wounded and escaped to bleed to death in the process of obtaining one preserved kill.

There is danger for individuals who would hunt these cats. The animals can and will protect themselves when threatened. Also, we should all be cautious about "awakening a sleeping tiger" here. The cats are habituated to avoiding humans in this modern age of firearms. If they were to become the subject of intensive hunting and effective harassment wherever they appeared, we might replace their reluctance for human contact with a belligerence that would bring harm to unwary people. If constantly bothered the cats over time could turn into a threat that they do not represent at this time.

I advocate that we study this creature from a distance. When large animals remain unknown -- a cryptid to be studied by cryptozoologists -- they are already rare animals. We can learn much about them by using our brains and technology without harming them needlessly. The approach I call "telebiology" would have us gather information, analyze it, record and measure the animals at a distance, and ultimately study specimens as they become available by means other than random killing.[32]

Personally I do not expect a sudden interest in American lions to appear. The best that we might hope for is that a modest and almost informal network of curious people be formed. They would attempt to track the appearances of native American cats, such as the puma in the East and the American lion wherever it appears. If a wide-spread appeal were made for reports of wild cats, more reports would surface and people might have a place to go with their reports.

Perhaps we could learn a lesson from the neglect of this body of coherent data on the American lion. We should try to gather reports of **any unusual cats** and sort them later. For now they go uncollected or languish in obscurity as has the observation of a cat made by Chandler Robbins. John V. Dennis mentions in **The Great Cypress Swamps** that a footnote in an unpublished paper by Robbins tells of a slim and long-legged cat that remains unidentified.[33] I know of still other odd cats reported in North America. Might we not make some effort in our lifetimes to tackle these questions? If not, we leave all the fun of these mysteries to our children and grandchildren.

If I were a young naturalist today, I would see the possible survival of the American lion as a promising opportunity. Here is a subject that can be pursued in almost any part of the U.S.A. Though neglected in historical times, the subject has a past that can still be recovered. In the present we can interview people who have seen them, we can observe the cats for ourselves, we can find their tracks, and learn about them in the wild. We have the chance to compare our knowledge of cats known from fossils with the living creatures. As so often the case in cryptozoology, here is a subject waiting for adventurous minds to take up the its challenge.

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THE EASTERN CATAMOUNT (*Felis concolor*)

by Mark A. Hall

In 1896 naturalist Frederic Lucas of the U.S. National Museum in Washington described the puma with these words:

Puma [= Peruv.]: the common name for **Felis concolor**, a large member of the cat family (**Felidae**) inhabiting America; also known as panther, mountain lion, lion, tiger, and -- in books at least -- as cougar and catamount. It is of a general reddish gray, or tawny, above, whitish beneath, end of tail dusky, outside of ears and a spot on either side of the muzzle black. The young, two to five in number, are spotted. Next to the jaguar the puma is the largest cat of the New World, attaining a length of 8 feet and a weight of 200 lb., although individuals of this size are very rare. Few terrestrial mammals have a more extended north and south range. It is found from Patagonia to 60° N. lat., from Maine to California and throughout South America up to a height of 9,000 feet on the Andes. Naturally with such a range there are great variations in size, color, coat, and ferocity. The puma is ordinarily a cowardly animal, but when wounded or brought to bay it is dangerous. It is usually silent and the tales of its "blood-curdling scream" are mostly apocryphal. The creature feeds largely on deer, but smaller animals are eaten, even the Canada porcupine. In South America the aguti, capybara, and rhea are extensively preyed upon, and, when accessible, calves, sheep, and pigs. For a full account of the puma, with numerous references to literature on the subject, see **The Puma, or American Lion**, by F.W. True, Report U.S. Nat. Museum (1889), pp 591. [1]

A half century later two biologists with the U.S. Department of Interior, Stanley Young and Edward Goldman, had their major work on the puma published. **The Puma, Mysterious American Cat**[2] became the standard treatment of this animal. Young described the cat's history and habits. Goldman described its geographic variation and the identities of its numerous subspecies.

In 1946 Young was able to say that the puma was recorded at an altitude of 13,000 feet, that the puma could "scream," and that the animal was extinct -- in books, at least -- in the eastern half of the U.S.A., except for Florida. He wrote: "The species is now regarded as extinct east of the Mississippi River, except in Florida."

He put the cat's range in southern Florida, perhaps in northern Louisiana, and in the wilder regions west of 100° West Longitude. As we will see later the book contains numerous caveats on the appearances of the puma in the East.

The view that the cat has not been around the East during the twentieth century is the topic of the discussion that follows. That the cats have continued to be reported in the East is a fact beyond dispute. Are they valid? Where do the cats come from? Has the puma returned? Did it ever leave? Knowledge of the puma in the East might tell us something about the persistence of **Panthera atrox**, the American

lion, which is similarly reported in numerous locations in North America.[3]

Young found scant record of the puma in the province of New Brunswick. A man was said to have been attacked by a puma in 1841. And Young speculated that "in earlier days" cats entering from Maine may have fed on the abundance of deer in New Brunswick. This view was disputed almost immediately by Bruce S. Wright. His paper on the survival of the puma in New Brunswick was published in the **Journal of Mammalogy** in 1948.

Wright gathered together his reports of the puma into book form in 1959 and had his **The Ghost of North America** published by a vanity press. In 1972 a revised version was published by Clarke, Irwin, & Company in Toronto as **The Eastern Panther: A Question of Survival**. Wright was director of the Northeastern Wildlife Station of the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, from 1947 to 1974. He learned of numerous puma encounters in New Brunswick from 1904 to 1971. He also recorded reports from Nova Scotia and Quebec. He took note of reports from eastern states extending from Maine to Alabama.

Despite such efforts the Young and Goldman view that the Eastern panther is extinct has had a lasting effect. When biologist Maurice Hornocker described the puma for **National Geographic** in 1992 the areas of "cougar country" were confined to the West and southern Florida. Otherwise the Eastern panther was summed up in a notation that "recent sightings of mountain lions in the Appalachians are unconfirmed." [4]

A quite different view of their occurrence was presented by wildlife photographer Leonard Lee Rue III in his **Furbearing Animals of North America** in 1981.[5] He acknowledged their presence in the central provinces of Canada and in New Brunswick. The states of Maine, New York, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama are among the places indicated as harboring pumas. Rue wrote that the great cats were extirpated but have returned to their old haunts.

The Canadian Wildlife Federation thinks the panther is found in its eastern provinces. According to a report in 1977 "Canada's eastern cougar population has been reduced to around 100 individuals, about half of them in central New Brunswick." [6]

I will present a summary of the record of the eastern catamount by state and province. I considered mapping all the reports but, when drawing upon the many scattered sources (books, newspapers, and conservation articles), I found them so numerous that the task could not be accomplished in the time I can devote to this subject.

There is a desire on the part of many to dismiss reports by persons rated as "unqualified." I have noticed, however, that reports from people who are "qualified," that is, biologists, professionals in game and park management, and others with experience, do not seem to go any further to settle the issue of a panther presence. The presumption of extinction in the East has always seemed to outweigh any testimony. Here I will present the record of reports as best I know them with their sources.

I am mindful that hoaxes regarding mountain lions have occurred. Here are some examples. Around Elgin, Illinois, in 1969 a man claimed to have captured a mountain lion. Some investigation turned up the fact that he was renting a puma from another party in Illinois to put on display. It appeared to be a publicity stunt.[7] In West

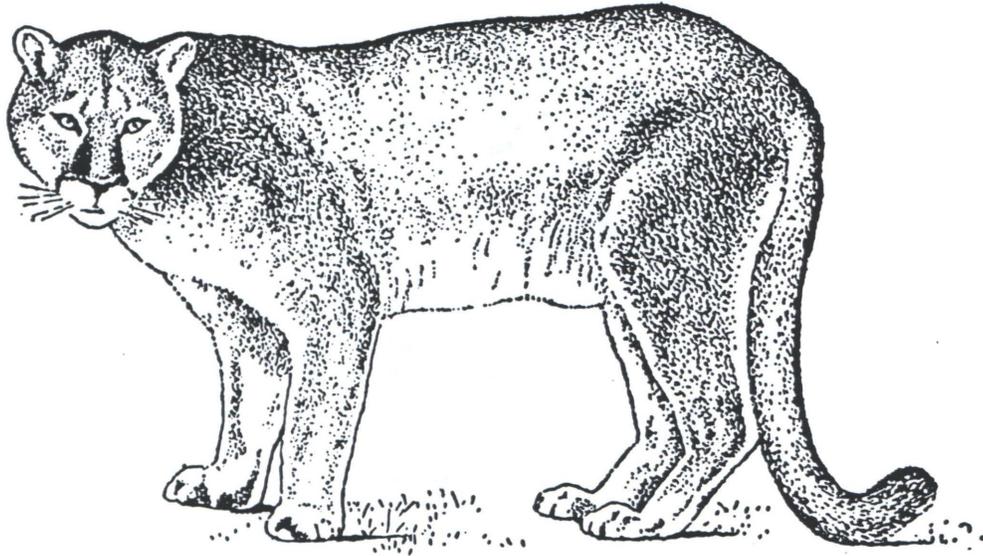


Fig. 1. The puma (*Felis concolor*) is a survivor in the eastern states and provinces of North America.

Virginia prior to 1971 a medical doctor reportedly purchased a puma for the express purpose of hoaxing a newspaper editor. His panther from Mexico arrived after the editor's death. Still someone was persuaded to claim he captured the cat from the wild on Kennison Mountain. The animal was put on display for the benefit of a local fire department. It was eventually exposed as a hoax, though blaming the wrong person.[8]

Another hoax was claimed by Earnest ("Wild Bill") White of Decatur, Alabama. He told Tony Estes of *The Decatur Daily* that around 1977 he and a friend had caused cougar reports around Flint Creek. This was accomplished with a noisemaker, false tracks, and a "contraption" that looked like an animal.[9] It would be fair to point out that the validity of this claim is unknown. It might only be an instance of story-telling without foundation. Stories negative to the presence of pumas should be subject to some proof, as is desired for stories that are positive.

Here is a look at the Eastern states and provinces where cats are said to have been seen in the twentieth century. Information from Young and Goldman's *The Puma* (Y&G) appears on their pages 12-43 unless otherwise indicated.

New Brunswick, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Mass, Conn:

The survival of the puma in New Brunswick and surrounding states and provinces is discussed at length in Bruce Wright's *The Eastern Panther*[10]. For his home province he gives constant reports from 1900 to 1971. The *Mammals of Canada* acknowledges that "a few individuals are now known to occur in New Brunswick." [11]

In Maine Y&G note that one was killed in 1891. Wright cites spotty reports in the state over the period of 1897 to 1965. A man from Connecticut reports a sighting in Maine in 1962.[12] Throughout the 1980's Loren Coleman has been sending me reports of pumas in the state from the Boston and Portland papers.

The latest from Loren Coleman is an unfolding story of a photograph produced by Wayne Perri of Hartland, Maine. It was publicized in February of 1994. It shows a large cat flanked by two of Perri's hounds (Fig. 2).[13]

For New Hampshire sources in Y&G indicated word of cougars in 1902 and a pair of them known in the 1920s. In Vermont into the 1930s there were "repeated reports of panthers seen and heard in various parts of the State." Alternatively, some declared the last panther killed in 1881. C.B. Colby has written in *Yankee Magazine* of five past puma reports in Vermont and New Hampshire.[14] In 1992 *Vermont Life* asked "Has the Cat Come Back?"[15] The Fish and Wildlife Department is insisting that any cats in the wild have been released, are escapees, or have come from some distant population. Recent reports in New Hampshire took place in 1983 and 1991.[16]

Some declared the cat extinct in Massachusetts in the middle of the 19th century. But Y&G found one source citing a puma as late as 18 January 1926. Bruce Wright was able to cite accounts from that year to 1971.[17] The cat is back in the news in the 1980s in the western part of the state, south of the Quabbin Reservoir, and on Cape Cod.[18]

A letter to *Yankee* from George K. Libby in 1974 gave this report:

Five times during the last year the presence of such an animal has been reported to me in a 20- to 30-square-mile area north of this city [Bristol, CT] in the adjoining township of Burlington.[19]

Ontario, New York, Pennsylvania:

Y&G declared the cat extinct in Ontario in 1908. In 1976 a senior biologist with the Canadian government, Gerald McKeating, said he had received 80 puma sightings over ten years. They clustered in the province's two white-tailed deer ranges: in northwestern Ontario around Kenora and in the south-central area east of Georgian Bay.[20]

According to Y&G the cat was gone from New York after 1908. The cats have been reported in the state in the 1970s and 1980s.

In Pennsylvania none were killed since 1891 (Y&G). A couple of reports commonly known for the state are cats at Reynoldsville in 1944 [21] and Venago Township, Crawford Co., in 1967.[22] Helen McGinnis guaranteed her sources confidentiality and found many sightings and kills of pumas in the years 1891 to 1981.[23]

West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina:

In West Virginia a few cougars still were about in 1910 according to the sources in Y&G. They noted tracks were reported in 1935 and 1936. In the 1970s there was an admission in several articles in *Wonderful West Virginia* that people had been seeing lions and tracks going back at least to 1968.[24]

In Virginia the puma was declared extinct in Y&G, with the last record being 1880. However, they note on p.12 a record of a cat in the Shenandoah National Park in 1944. Two animals were seen.



Fig. 2. This drawing shows the content of a photograph made by Wayne Perri of Hartland, Maine. He took his dogs out after Christmas of 1993 and encountered this animal in the Decker Pond area. It may be the first picture of a living Maine puma.

The latest from the park came in 1979 when a track was found, casted, and identified as that of a puma.[25]

Modern sightings in Virginia around Potts Mountain and the Peaks of Otter have been reported.[26]

For Maryland Y&G come to no conclusion, but the species appeared to have gone out in the middle of the last century. The **Mammals of Maryland** in 1969 noted:

There is no question that today, however, the species is extinct in Maryland despite the fact that from time to time there are reports of them in some of the more remote portions of the State.[27]

Some of the reports in Maryland through the years are mentioned in B.F. Beebe's **American Lions and Cats**: Olney-Norbeck in December 1960, Clarksburg in December 1960 and July 1961.[28] Near Frostburg in August of 1971 a cougar was seen.[29] The District of Columbia was the scene of a puma hunt in 1983.[30]

Great Smoky Mountains National Park has seen supposed mountain lion sightings from 1938 to 1967. They are itemized in a 1971 summary in **Mammals of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park**.[31]

The Carolinas North and South have experienced puma reports as researched by Herbert Ravenel Sass.[32] Y&G considered the cats gone in this century.

Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky:

In Georgia Y&G found the puma reported in the Okefenokee into the 1920s. People still report them in the last half of this century, in southern and northern sections of the state.[33]

Florida is recognized as home to the Florida panther. The animal is endangered and appears to have inbred with cougars introduced into the state by humans.

In Y&G Alabama was allowed to have sheltered pumas into the 1920s. My files show reports from 1950, 1976, 1983, and 1988.

Mississippi is reported to have the cats today in the Yazoo National Wildlife Refuge.[34]

In Tennessee a panther was seen in 1937 (Y&G). The last cat in Kentucky was killed in 1863 (Y&G).

Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin:

The cat in Illinois was declared "extremely doubtful" in 1912 (Y&G). In Indiana it had "practically disappeared" in the 1850s (Y&G). In my files I have newspaper reports of cougars in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois from the 1940s into 1994.

The cougar "still remains in the state" of Wisconsin into 1939 according to Y&G. Later reports have been labeled escapees but without evidence for such an origin.[35] I have added newspaper reports to my files in more recent years.

Manitoba, Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota :

Manitoba has had cougar reports and one animal killed.[36]

Officially the last cougar in Minnesota was there in 1875 (Y&G). Minnesota has seen an increasing number of cougar reports over several recent decades.[37]

Iowa has seen mountain lions in the northern part of the state.[38]

Regarding North Dakota, a 1964 animal study noted that "authentic reports of their presence in the State have been made in recent years." [39]

The cougar is acknowledged to occur in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas:

The last cougar credited in Missouri by Y&G appeared in 1887. Biologist Dunbar Robb has written of their appearances in the state in the 1960s.[40] The last Kansas cougar was killed in 1904 (Y&G). They have been suspected since but not verified. In Oklahoma a pair of the cats was reported in 1917 in Cleveland County.[41] Arkansas has had reports according to journalists in other states but the records of reports have been hard to obtain.

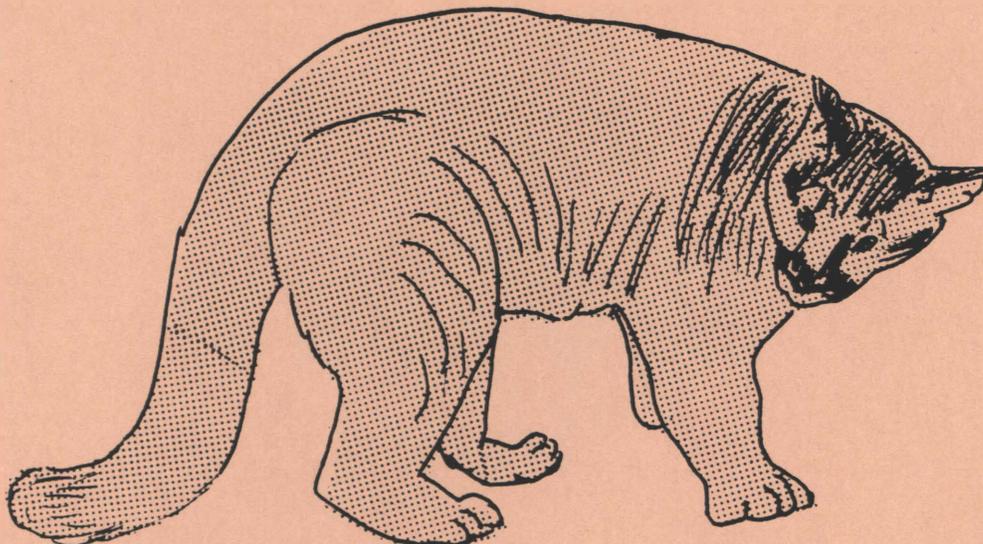
The eastern catamount appears to have been doing well if we credit many of the reports in this century. This cat species is cautious and wise. I lack the space to elaborate on these factors. They keep to the rivers and wilder spaces and remain unseen most of the time. They seem never to have left the eastern parts of North America. If we leave them in peace they are likely to do well. They have turned up even in the populous state of New Jersey.[42] So have their curious relatives, the American lions.[43] Both genera seem to be capable of surviving in the East in modern times. We should consider in our future how we might best study these stealthy and capable cats.

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