



Wild Cats Need Room to Roam

Keeping Track of Local Carnivores

How much space do mountain lions and bobcats need? How do they deal with roads and development? What threats do they face? These are just a few of the questions National Park Service scientists are answering through long-term monitoring.

To study wild cat behavior, scientists need to track their movements. Researchers trap bobcats and mountain lions, attach radio transmitters, and collect radio signals. That's no easy task, since wild cats are wary, smart, nocturnal, and wide-ranging. The challenge of long-term monitoring pays off, though, because the more we know about wild cats, the better equipped we are to protect them.



NPS scientist Jeff Sikich radio-collars a mountain lion.

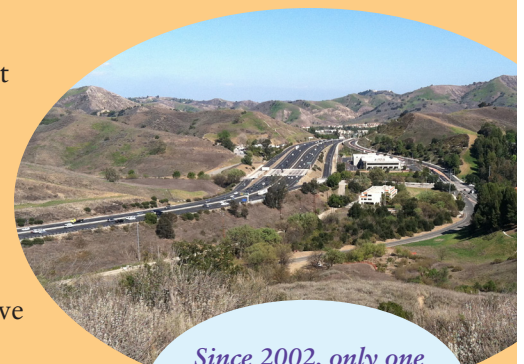
What Scientists Have Learned

Linked Habitats: Key to Survival

A single male mountain lion uses about 100,000 acres of natural habitat, about the size of the entire Santa Monica Mountains! If mountain lions cannot move between natural areas, their population will not survive. It's essential to keep open spaces connected and create new habitat links where needed.

Bobcats Cope with Urbanization

Bobcats are surprisingly adaptable to living near people. That helps them survive in our region's fragmented habitat. But bobcats in developed areas face many risks, like being hit by cars or poisoned by rodenticides. Preserving natural habitat is the best way to keep bobcat populations healthy.



Since 2002, only one radio-collared lion has crossed Highway 101.



Since 1996, NPS scientists have radio-tracked more than 200 local bobcats.

Toxic Lunch: Rodenticides

In the Santa Monica Mountains, seven out of eight wild cats tested positive for two or more rodent poison toxins. Researchers found higher levels of toxins in wild cats that spent more time in developed areas. Over time, rodenticides can weaken and kill wild cats.

Taking Action for Wild Cats

Conserve and Connect Open Space

Long-term monitoring spotlights the critical need to maintain adequate and connected natural habitat. In Liberty Canyon, scientists have identified the single remaining corridor of natural habitat that mountain lions could follow to cross under Highway 101, **if a wildlife tunnel is constructed.**

Say No to Rodenticides

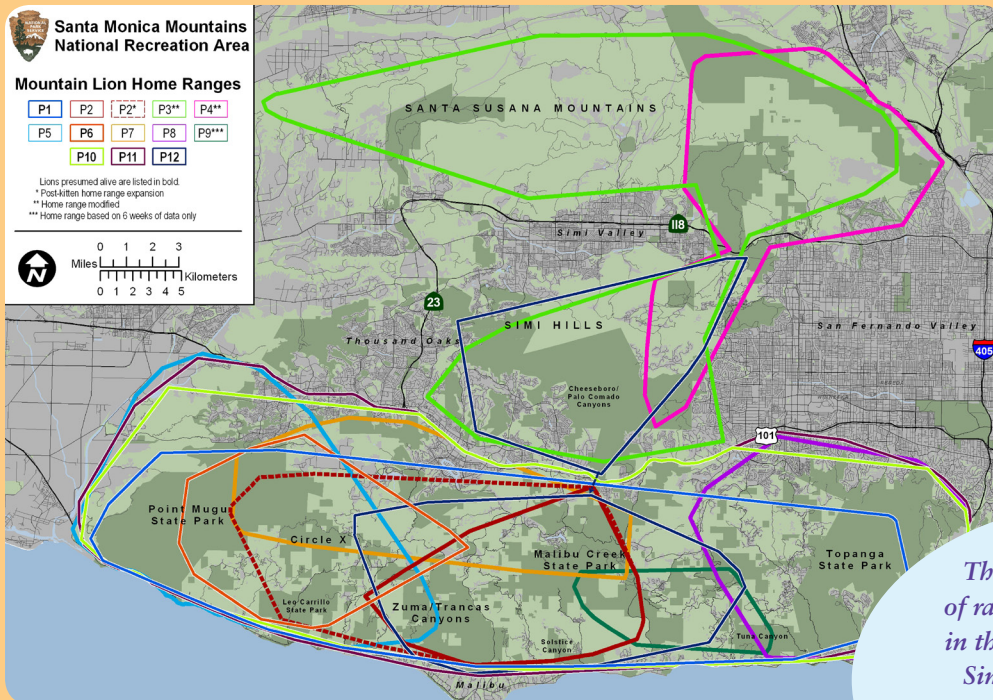
NPS research shows that rodent poisons harm and sometimes kill our native wild cats. Fortunately, there are many other ways to control rodents. Use traps, or prevent rodents from entering buildings by plugging holes and installing wire mesh.

Co-existing with Wild Cats

Can wild cats survive in our local natural areas? That depends on our willingness to give them the space they need and take steps to avoid conflicts with them. Small efforts, like bringing pets and livestock in at night and driving with care, can make a big difference.



Between 2002 and 2004, scientists charted a sharp rise in bobcat deaths caused by mange, a disease unknown in non-urban wild cat populations. Among the cats that died of mange, all had rodenticides in their systems. Did the toxicants weaken the cats and make them more susceptible to mange? Long-term studies help scientists answer tough questions like this.



This map shows home ranges of radio-collared mountain lions in the Santa Monica Mountains, Simi Hills, and Santa Susana Mountains. Highway 101 forms a nearly impenetrable barrier to wild cat dispersal between key natural areas.