

## 2.5 Cougar (*Puma concolor: ssp: oregonensis, missoulensis, vancouverensis*)

### Appearance and Size

In British Columbia, the average adult male weighs about 46 kg and the average adult female weighs about 37 kg. Several cougar taken have weighed between 70 kg and 78 kg. Large adult males may measure 2.7 m in length, including a 76 cm tail. The fur is short and ranges in colour from reddish-brown to a grey-brown, with light underparts. Very young kittens are spotted, with ringed tails. This coloration is gradually lost as young cougar reach adulthood. Adults are unmarked. One black cougar was reported several years ago in the North Okanagan area, while white or very light-coloured cougar are infrequently reported.

### Life History

Cougar are polygamous and only the female tends the young. Females reach sexual maturity at 2 to 3 years of age. Breeding takes place at any time of the year, and one to six kittens are born after a gestation period of about 3 months. The female gives birth to her young in a rocky crevice or den, protected by roots or windfalls. Kittens are born with their eyes closed, but these open 10 to 14 days after birth. The kittens nurse for at least five to six weeks. Kittens will take meat at about six weeks of age.



(Photo: BC Parks)



(Stock photo)



(Photo: W.L. Miller, US National Park Service)



(Photo: BC Parks)



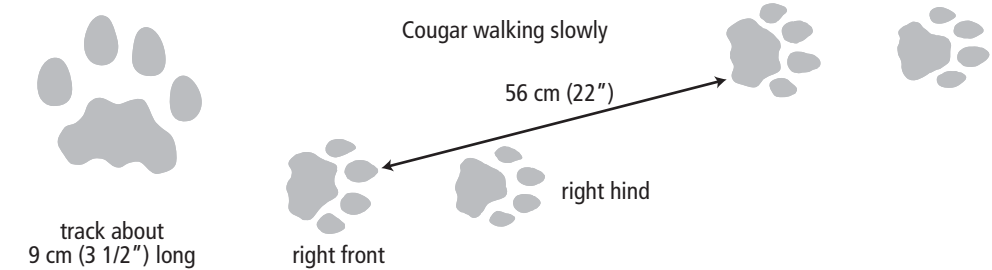
## Abundance and Distribution

Cougar are found throughout British Columbia. Distribution extends north from the United States/British Columbia border to the Big Muddy River on the Alaska Highway, south of about 54 degrees latitude; and from the British Columbia-Alberta border west, to and including, most coastal islands. (*Map 2.5*) To date, cougar have not reached the Queen Charlotte Islands. The territory or home range maintained by individual adult cougar ranges up to, or greater than, 260 km<sup>2</sup>. The female cougar maintain winter territories of 13 km<sup>2</sup> to 52 km<sup>2</sup>. Females with kittens require larger ranges than females without kittens, and some overlap of female ranges occurs. Males occupy larger territories, in the range of 65 km. Resident males do not overlap ranges. Transient cougars move through occupied ranges, but avoid resident cougar. Cougar distribution is governed by the distribution of deer, its major prey species. Summer observations are scanty, but as the snow recedes cougar probably spread out from the lower slopes and valley bottoms to inhabit virtually all elevations within their general distributional boundaries. During winter months, cougar follow deer down to the lower elevations. Cougar seem to prefer the rough, rocky, semi-open areas surrounding the major deer winter ranges in the Interior, but they do not confine their activities exclusively to this type of habitat. Cougar can be found anywhere within a game winter range.



(Photo: Jim Peaco, US National Park Service)

Text and map adapted from: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 1994a.



Adapted from: McDougall (1997); Shomon (1969) and Sheldon and Hartson (1999).



(Photo: Keith Marcotte)

## Characteristic Features



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)



(Photo: Leonard Sielecki, BCMoT)

**Map 2.5**

