Carnivores of the Central Coast

This talk has been adapted from its original version to focus on content rather than presentation

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Mountain Lions, Pumas, Cougars, Panthers

- Females weigh ~80lbs
- Males weigh ~115
- Solitary except when mating or females have dependent young
- Low reproductive rate
- Young remain with their mom and siblings until they disperse at 15 to 24 months old
  - At this time they are hunting for themselves for the first time and setting out into unknown country.
  - They must avoid resident males and look for open habitat to make a territory of their own
  - This is when they are most likely to get into trouble or wander into suburban/urban areas
  - High mortality
- Cubs must disperse before a female will breed again

Is the puma population growing?

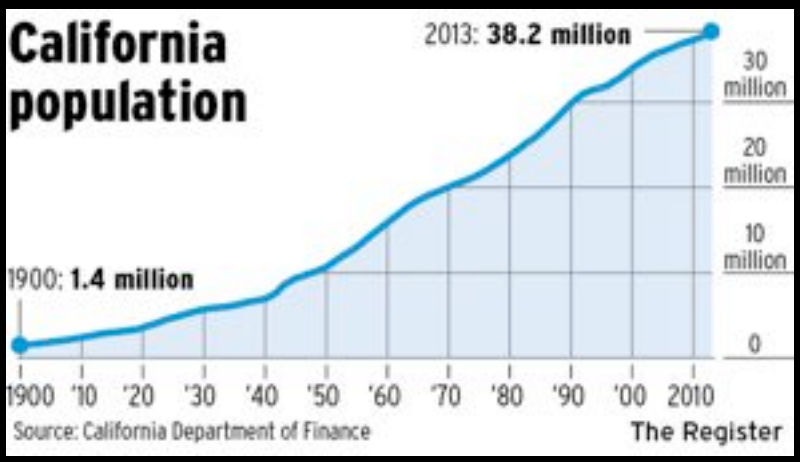
1907-1963

1990

In order to understand the current status of pumas, we need to look at the history.

- Traditionally, large-scale government-sponsored predator eradication was the norm
- By 1900, pumas were considered rare 2/3 of the US
- In California, there was a bounty on pumas from 1907-1963
- Heavy hunting depressed the population
- In the 80s and 90s, the population started to recover
  - The population likely peaked in the mid 90s
- There are likely more pumas than there were 100 years ago, but almost certainly not more than there were historically

Why does the population seem to be increasing?



The human population has grown, so there are more people to see pumas

Why does the population seem to be increasing?

More Remote Cameras:

A couple decades ago, this man would have never known that a puma hopped on top of his car

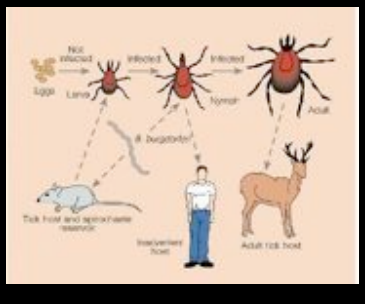
Better Information Sharing:

We hear about encounters more often in part because social medial allows us to broadly share information.

Coyotes

- Weigh 18 to 35 lbs
- Live alone, in pairs, or in family groups
- May mate for life
- Eat small mammals, including rodents and rabbits, fruits, and vegetation
- High reproductive rate, can have pups each year
- Alpha pair suppresses breeding in subordinate members of group

Why should we value carnivores?



- Predators keep prey populations healthy and help keep them from becoming overabundant
- They eat small mammals and can help decrease the spread of small mammal borne diseases, such as Lyme disease
- They can help reduce population sizes of animals that compete with cattle for forage, such as rabbits (surprisingly enough) Ranglack et al. 2015

What happens when things go wrong?

- Domestic animals are inherently more vulnerable than wild prey.

We have seen cases where pumas or coyotes will kill multiple goats or sheep in one night and not eat them, what then?

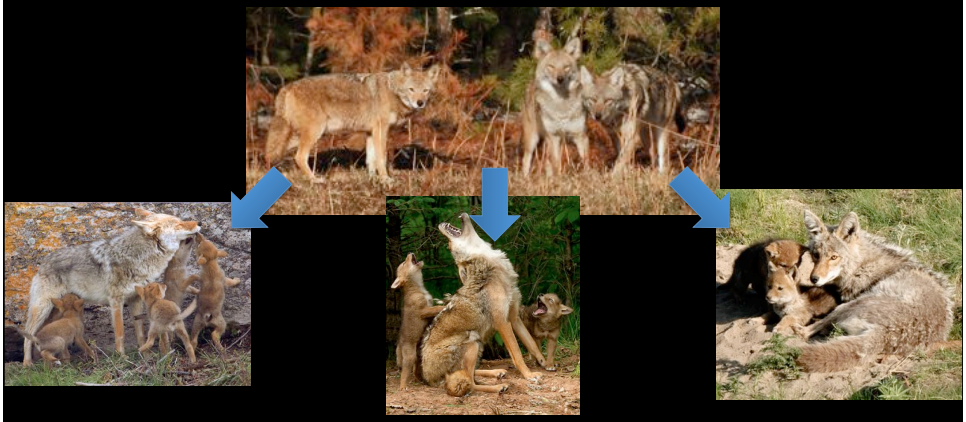
- This is likely a case of evolutionary mismatch: Pumas and coyotes did not evolve for a situation in which their prey cannot escape. In nature, when they kill an herbivore, any other members of the herd flee. In a pen, remaining members may repeatedly trigger the puma's predator instinct.

We have a history of predator eradication, why not use lethal control in these situations?

In short, it could make the problem worse.

- Carnivore social structure keeps the population steady
- Removing a dominant individual may create a social vacuum filled by multiple younger individuals
- This could increase the number of carnivores in a given area
- These younger individuals are less experienced and could cause more depredations

Why not use lethal control?



- Removing an alpha pack member can cause the pack to break apart
- Members of the pack who wouldn't have bred before can now have pups, increasing the number of carnivores in the area

Want to Learn More?

Living with Lions

Living with Lions

- Only 6 fatalities in over 100 years in California
- Most puma encounters only last for a couple seconds
- You are more likely to be killed by just about anything else

Thank You