

'Curious' mountain lion at UCSC won't be killed

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animals
SEP 16/94

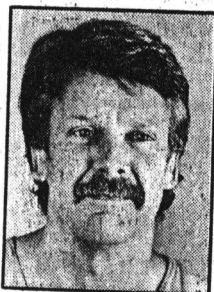
SANTA CRUZ — Curiosity won't kill the cat, this time.

Department of Fish and Game officials have concluded that the mountain lion that loped along behind a jogger and his dog at UC Santa Cruz last week was probably just curious, not hunting.

As a result, the tawny-coated big cat won't be tracked and killed, said Department of Fish and Game biologist Dennis Baldwin.

"We want to be very sure, before we would take an action to kill, that we have given the animal every chance that is possible and weighed public safety as the overriding concern," said Baldwin.

If the lion has a number of similar encounters with people, however, the decision might change, Baldwin warned. "Let's say we had five contacts like this. That certainly would weigh differently



The lion chased attorney George Smith and his dog.

than one incident like this."

Baldwin said wildlife biologists have concluded that the encounter Santa Cruz attorney George Smith and his dog had with the campus cougar was not threatening from the lion's point of view.

"Let's put it this way. A mountain lion is not the type of animal that trots after its prey for a long period of time. It doesn't want to work any harder to catch something than it has to," said Baldwin.

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Lion will be spared

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"If it had wanted to attack, it would have rushed up very quickly rather than trotted along behind him."

Smith met the mountain lion early Saturday morning when he and his dog, Daiquiri, ran along the Chinquapin Trail through a meadow just north of campus.

The lion loped behind the two, backed off when Smith raised his arms and yelled at it, and then, when Smith crawled under a fence along Empire Grade Road, ran under the fence into the road.

Smith said he felt the animal was trying to cut off his escape. Baldwin said, however, that a flanking maneuver is typical of a curious cat trying to get a better look.

While fish and game officials de-

bated whether the lion was a threat, university officials warned joggers to stay out of the remote areas of the campus. They also advised people to leave their dogs at home when they use the fire trails.

Notices about the lion will be distributed to students, who resume classes Sept. 29.

Baldwin said a number of people have called the Department of Fish and Game, pleading that the lion not be killed.

The university also has received calls, mostly from people who want to know how risky it is to jog in the county, said Deb White, UCSC animal control officer.

The lion hasn't been seen since Saturday, said White. But lion sightings on the rural campus are not uncommon. Since May, there have been five, said White. The university has posted warnings pe-

'If it had wanted to attack, it would have rushed up very quickly. ...'

— Dennis Baldwin,
wildlife biologist

riodically and two years ago issued a lion notice after a cougar-killed deer carcass was found near the student health center.

But Smith's encounter was the first time a lion had chased someone, said White.

White thinks that at least one lion includes the university in its range. The university lies in a swath of long-time prime lion country that includes Wilder Ranch State Park, Gray Whale Ranch, the university, Pogonip Park and Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.