

# Mountain lions on the prowl

## Confrontations possible, warns Fish and Game

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SANTA CRUZ — It's summertime, the season when humans and mountain lions are most likely to meet, wildlife officials say.

Warning signs have been posted near wooded areas around the Santa Cruz County, and with good reason.

"Your area has been known for mountain lion sightings," said Troy Swauger, of the Department of Fish & Game in Sacramento.

In recent years a man and a dog were stalked by a mountain lion on the UC Santa Cruz campus, and sightings have been reported from downtown Boulder Creek to Cabrillo College.

"We do have signs posted in many of the remote areas of the campus saying that lions have been sighted," said UCSC spokesman Jim Burns.

State rangers say hikers in the Pogonip area report seeing several mountain lions each year.

Jack Edwards, Chief of California Department of Fish and Game's Conservation Edu-



Sentinel file photo

Human-lion confrontations are possible throughout the county, especially where the deer population is heavy.

cation Office.

The state population of the species has grown from 600 in 1920 to 2,000 in the 1970's to an estimated 4,000 to 6,000 today, Swauger said.

"What you'll find is that mountain lions tend to be where their primary food source is," he said. "If you've got an abundant deer population, you'll see more mountain lions."

Santa Cruz County at one time was record-

ed as a habitat for the animals, according to studies by the department, said Swauger.

Tips the department listed to people roaming outdoors included:

- Do not hike alone
- Keep children close to you
- Do not approach a lion
- Do not run from a mountain lion — running may stimulate a mountain lion's instinct to chase. Instead, stand and face the animal. Make eye contact. If you have small

children with you, pick them up if possible so they don't panic and run. Although it may be awkward, pick them up without bending over or turning away from the mountain lion.

- Do not crouch down or bend over.

"If you're camping or hiking, make sure you keep anything that may attract them by scent away from you," Swauger said.

The likelihood of rattlesnakes here can also be high in grassy areas, he said.

Animals