BEARS, COUGARS AND WOLVES... OH MY!
Adapting to Life with Large Carnivores in Chicago’s Urban Wilderness

Sixth Biennial Wild Things Conference

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Sightings of Cougars, Black Bear and Wolves in the Midwest

- Conservation efforts nation-wide have been successful!
- Populations are recovering and looking for new territory
- Recent confirmed records in Illinois, surrounding states.

Shooting of a Young Male Cougar

- Whiteside County, Illinois
- November 22, 2013

Chicago Wilderness Interest

- Education Committee and Wildlife Task Force teamed up to address issue locally.
BEARS, COUGARS AND WOLVES... OH MY!

- “Living with Black Bears, Cougars, and Wolves: Ecology and Human Dimensions”
  - Brookfield Zoo
  - September 25, 2014
OBJECTIVES:

- Convey Lessons Learned
- Discuss Dispersal Biology of Cougars, Black Bear and Wolves in the Midwest
  - Where are they coming from?
  - What do these three species require?
- Discuss Living with Them
  - How do you identify and report them?
  - How would public need to adapt?
  - How would our natural communities be affected?
  - How could resource professionals respond?
RANGE EXPANSION: BLACK BEAR

Historic Range

Current Range

Hall 1981

Pelton, 1982, Pelton et al 1994
RANGE EXPANSION: GRAY WOLF

Historic Range

Current Range

Range in 1974

United States Fish and Wildlife Service
NEAREST POPULATIONS OF BEARS AND WOLVES

Wisconsin

Bear distribution has expanded further south & southwest

= Abundant
= Common
= Occasional
= Rare

2011 Wolf Territories

Wolf Territories
Based on radio-tracking
Based on field and other signs

2010 Hound Depredations
2011 Hound Depredations
2011 Probable Wolf Range

Wisconsin DNR
RANGE EXPANSION: COUGAR

Current Range and Dispersal

National Geographic Magazine December 2013.
HAS IT BEEN HAPPENING FOR A LONG TIME?

Reports to Agencies and Media

- Periodic (esp. cougars) unconfirmed reports for 20+ years.

- Most probably based on really seeing something, but identification difficult to verify.

- Possibly some hoaxes.
“Record?” or “Report?”

- **Record**: report with enough evidence to be considered proven, and maintained as historically accurate.

- **Reports**: information conveyed, may include approximate time, date, location to an agency, news media, etc.

  - **Unconfirmed**: No tangible evidence, e.g., field referenced photograph, measureable paw print/tracks still present upon field investigation, carcass to base the report on.

  - **Confirmed**: Tangible, verifiable evidence made available, report can become a record.
BLACK BEAR

Ursus americanus
Fur almost always black, but there can be color phases.

Long brownish snout, small eyes, rounded ears, short tails.

About 3 feet high at shoulder, 3 - 5 feet in length.

Adult males weigh 125 - 500 lbs. Some much heavier. Females weigh 100 – 300 lbs.

Least dangerous of the three North American bears.
Adequate food resources are essential.

Black bears are large animals with a high energy demand, particularly at certain times of the year.

Black bears are opportunistic omnivores and consume a wide variety of food.

Diet consists of vegetation, but will eat insects, carrion and prey species. Easily develop a taste for human food and garbage.
BLACK BEAR
Ursus americanus

Behavior

- Solitary creatures, except for family groups and during mating season.

- Female home ranges are smaller than males, particularly with cubs.

- Movements are largely related to food supply – daily movements to forage for food.

- They spend the winter season dormant in their dens, feeding on body fat.
COUGAR

Puma concolor
COUGAR
Puma concolor

Identification

- Cougar, mountain lion, puma, catamount, panther — this cat is known by more names than just about any other mammal.

- Generally a solid tawny color, with darker hair on the back and a whitish underside.

- Adults can be 3 to 5 feet long with a 2 to 3 foot long tail.

- Males can weigh between 116 - 158 lbs. Females are smaller, weighing 75 - 105 lbs.
Distinguishing Bobcat from Cougar

The mountain lion has a long tail, while the bobcat has a short tail.
Diet and Food Habits

- Cougars are powerfully built, with large paws, sharp claws, and keen eyesight.

- Cougars eat a variety of prey, including deer, raccoons, rabbits, and squirrels. Some larger cats even bring down animals as large as an elk or moose.

- They often bury part of their kill to save for a later meal, hiding the food with leaves, grass, dirt, or snow.
COUGAR
Puma concolor

Behavior

- Cougars are active from dusk to dawn; sometimes travel and hunt during the day.

- Cougars rely on short bursts of speed to ambush prey; they may stalk an animal for an hour or more.

- A cougar’s daybed is used for rest, protection from the weather, and/or to raise young.

- The bond between male and female is short-lived; males play no role in raising young. Kittens stay with their mothers for 12 to 19 months.
GRAY WOLF
Canis lupus
GRAY WOLF
Canis lupus

Identification

- Fur is a buff tan grizzled with gray and black; can also be black or white.

- Rounded, relatively short ears and a large, blocky muzzle.

- 26 to 32 inches at shoulder, 4.5 to 6.5 feet in length.

- Adults can weigh 60 – 115 lbs.
Gray wolves are hyper carnivores – adapted to eat only meat.

They prefer to eat large hoofed mammals such as deer, elk, bison and moose.

Wolves also hunt smaller mammals such as beavers, rodents and rabbits.

They hunt individually, in packs, or by stealing the prey of other predators.

Adults can consume 20 pounds in a single meal.
Gray Wolf
*Canis lupus*

Behavior

- Packs are usually made up of 5 - 12 members. Wolves develop strong social bonds and display deep affection for families.

- Packs have complex social structures; there is a dominance hierarchy with a top male or female.

- They use both chemical and vocal methods to mark territory and communicate. Also use facial expressions and posture.

- They breed once a year. Females stay exclusively with pups for first few weeks and then all pack members help raise them.
GRAY WOLF
*Canis lupus*

**Wolf vs. Coyote**

TRACK SIZE:

Wolf: 3½" x 4½"

Coyote: 1½" x 2½"
Gray Wolf vs. Coyote

**Gray Wolf**
- Color: light gray to black
- Dimensions: 2.5 feet tall, 5-6 feet long
- Size: 80 – 120 pounds
- Broad snout
- Round ears

**Coyote**
- Color: light gray/ brown
- Dimensions: 1.5 feet tall, 4 feet long
- Size: 20 – 50 pounds
- Tall pointed ears
- Narrow snout
GRAY WOLF
*Canis lupus*

**Summer Wolf**

**Winter Wolf**
COEXISTING IN URBAN SETTINGS
HIKING AND CAMPING

- Respect trail closures.
- Pack food securely.
- Don’t feed wildlife.
- Keep kids and pets close.
- Don’t startle wildlife.
IN YOUR OWN YARD

- Do not feed pets outside.
- Secure garbage cans and compost bins.
- Manage bird feeders if you have them.
- Store grills inside and keep them clean.
- Keep cats indoors.
- Do not leave dogs outside unattended.
IF YOU ENCOUNTER A CRITTER

- Admire critters from a distance.
- If taking photographs, respect the animal's space.
- Report sightings.
- Stay calm.
- Don’t run.
- Leave the animal an escape route.
- Back away from the animal.
- Keep children and pets close, in your arms if possible.
- Don’t play dead.
- If attacked, fight back.
LET'S TALK

SHOULD WE GO INTO THE CITY FOR DINNER, OR SHOULD WE EAT HERE?

Cartoon courtesy of EcoMyths Alliance and Jim Hunt
FOR THE FUTURE

- Share your questions.
- Share your experiences.
- Write down your email address if you’d like to find out about future developments.
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**RESOURCES**

**Living with Wildlife**  
University of Illinois Extension  
http://web.extension.illinois.edu/wildlife/

**animalia project**  
animaliaproject.org/wildlife