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## Mountain Lion Sightings in Lafayette

By Cathy Tyson

Mountain lions have recently been sighted at the Lafayette Community Park and also along the Lafayette-Moraga Trail. While this type of cat is not something you see every day, they are a natural part of this region's environment, according to Jennifer Russell, Director of Lafayette's Parks and Recreation Department.

Wildlife ecologist Steve Bobzien with the East Bay Regional Park District emphasizes putting sightings in perspective, "Mountain lion attacks are extremely, extremely, extremely rare. If you think about the millions of people who are recreating in their habitat every day, the cats are doing a good job of avoiding people." He noted an interesting contrast: "There are over 950 serious dog bites per day in the U.S. that require medical attention." And they call dogs man's best friend. In the entire United States between 1890 and 2004 there were a total of 88 reported confirmed attacks on humans, according to the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

Over half of California is mountain lion habitat and they can be found wherever deer, their primary prey are found, according to the California Department of Fish and Game. Mountain lions are the loners of the animal kingdom - quiet, solitary and typically avoid people.

What to do if you or your kids are out and about in the Community Park or hiking in the area? Lafayette's Parks, Trails and Recreation Department, the East Bay Regional Park District and the Department of Fish and Game all offer this advice:

- Don't let small children wander out of sight
- Keep pets on a leash
- Make noise
- Do not approach the lion
- Do not run from the lion
- Face the lion, wave your arms slowly and speak in a loud voice
- Try to appear larger
- Do not crouch down or bend over
- Back away slowly, giving the lion an opportunity to escape
- Fight back if attacked

Coyotes are a different story. "They tend to frequent the urban - wildland interface and are very adaptable. You want to demonstrate that approaching humans has a negative effect," said Bobzien. He recommends yelling, screaming and throwing rocks at them.

In a statement, Director Russell said, "If you see a mountain lion and it's just walking through the park, call the Parks, Trails and Recreation Office at (925) 284-2232 and give them specific information on the size of the animal, the location and the direction it was headed. If the animal is acting aggressively, call local police dispatch at (925) 284-5010."

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