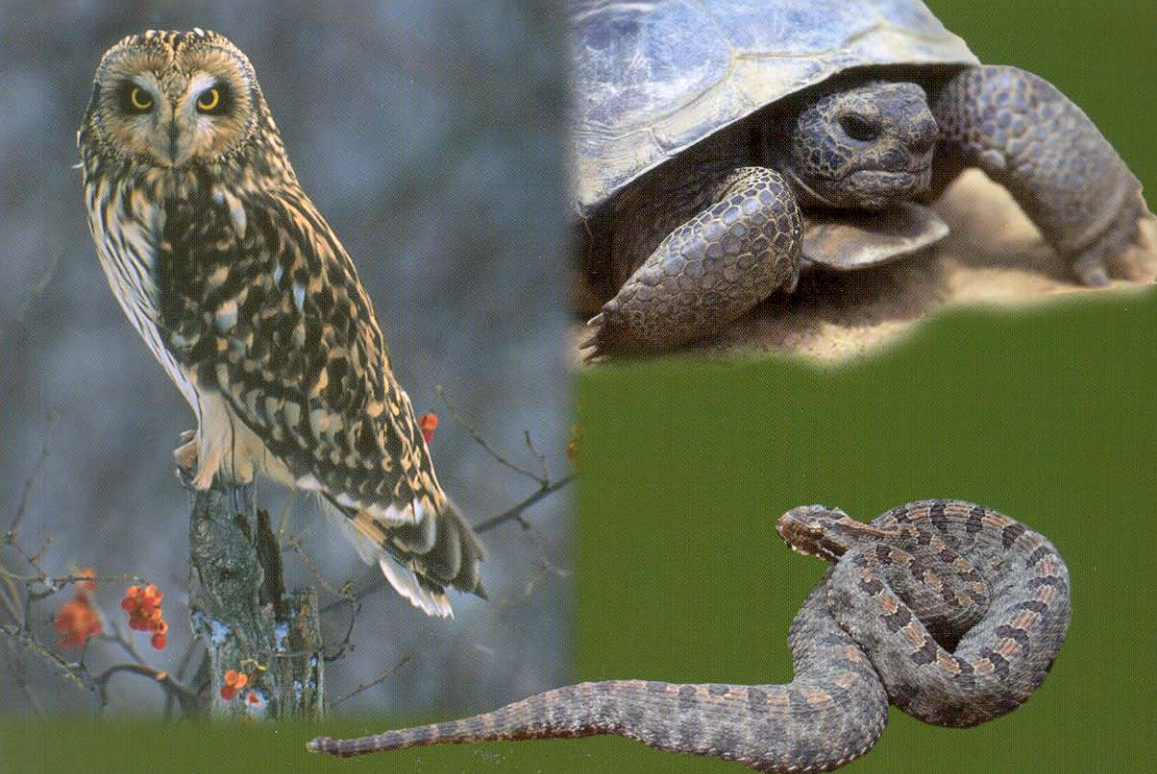




ALABAMA WILDLIFE

VOLUME THREE

**Imperiled Amphibians,
Reptiles, Birds,
and Mammals**

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PUMA

Puma concolor (Linnaeus)

OTHER NAMES. Mountain Lion, Cougar, Panther, Painter, Catamount (Young and Goldman 1946).

DESCRIPTION. Among the largest (150-275 cm [60-110 in.]; weight 35-100 kg [75-220 lb.]) native North American cats. Tawny, gray, red, or shades of brown dorsally, and contrary to popular lore, black pelage never documented; chin, medial muzzle, and ventral areas creamy white. Tail long, cylindrical, tipped with black, and more than one-third of total length. Ears short, rounded, without tufts, and blackish externally. Claws long, sharp, curved, and retractile. All heel pads distinctly three-lobed (Young and Goldman 1946, Choate *et al.* 1994).



Photo—USFWS

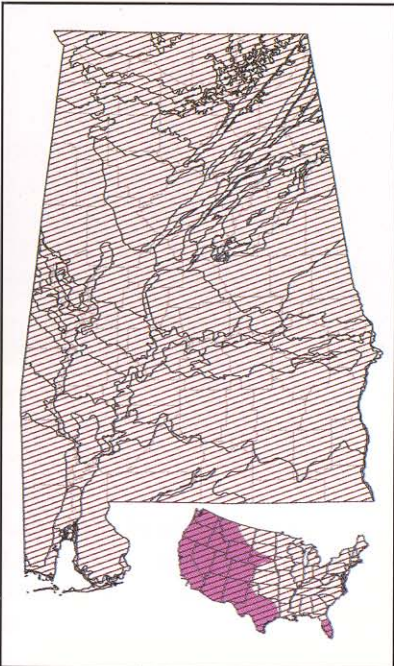
The subspecies that occupied much of Alabama was likely the Florida panther, *Puma concolor coryi* (Hall 1981), although the mountainous sections of northern Alabama may have been occupied by the eastern subspecies, *P. c. cougar*. Because no specimen of the native population was preserved, genetic affinities of native pumas in Alabama are unknown.

DISTRIBUTION. Originally, the puma had the widest distribution of any terrestrial mammal in the Western Hemisphere, extending from northern Canada and Alaska to the southern tip of Chile (Young and Goldman 1946, Choate *et al.* 1994). Although extirpated from most of its distribution in the southeastern United States, small populations exist in Florida, and possibly in Arkansas and Louisiana (Currier 1983, Choate *et al.* 1994). In Alabama, pumas were found statewide historically (Hall 1981). At present, reports of sightings in Alabama are relatively common, but these probably are released captives or cases of mistaken identity. Closest known extant and self-sustaining wild population is in Florida (*P. c. coryi*).

HABITAT. Primarily rough, rocky, upland woods, large tracts of bottomland forest and swamps, and remote mountainous regions that aid in avoiding humans. Spend most of time on the ground, but readily climb trees and rocks to escape pursuit or to gain an advantageous position when hunting (Dixon 1982, Currier 1983, Lindzey 1987, Choate *et al.* 1994).

LIFE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY. Solitary; the only social unit that endures more than a few days is the maternal bond of a female and her young. Females with small young avoid interactions with other pumas, but as young approach independence and female approaches estrous, she tolerates contact with other pumas of either sex. Males may occur together immediately after independence from the mother, but only rarely as established adult. Deer are the staple food, but also consume other animals including bobcats, elk, bighorn sheep, moose, nine-banded armadillos, coyotes, rodents, rabbits, feral swine, and domestic livestock. Prey are dragged to a secluded spot before eating begins. Once a puma has eaten its fill, it may hide the remainder of its kill under leaves, sticks, or pine needles for several

days (Young and Goldman 1946, Currier 1983). Polygamous, but the same individuals may mate year after year because of stability of home ranges (Seidensticker *et al.* 1973, Currier 1983). Home ranges of males often overlap those of several females. Females usually do not breed with more than one male during an estrous period. Gestation is about 90 days. Litters contain one to six young (average of three) weighing about 400 grams (14 ounces) each. Young born with eyes and ears closed, but these open in seven to 14 days. Young remain in, or near, den two to three months, when they are weaned and begin accompanying female on hunting trips. Pelage of young is black-spotted in three irregular dorsal lines and transverse rows. These spots are vivid until three to four months old and are still discernible at one year of age. Pumas first breed at two to three years old. Lifespan in the wild is 10-12 years, but some have lived longer than 20 years in captivity. Causes of mortality include injury from large prey, fighting, accidents (collision with motor vehicles, falls from cliffs, and drownings), and in the case of young, killing by other pumas. Also important are starvation, disease, and deaths caused by humans.



Pumas have few ectoparasites, possible due to their low densities, solitary nature, and mobile habits. Common endoparasites are tapeworms, which are ingested from lungs or pericardium of deer (Young and Goldman 1946, Currier 1983, Choate *et al.* 1994).

BASIS FOR STATUS CLASSIFICATION. Pumas probably were extirpated from Alabama in the mid-1800s. Occasional sightings suggest free-ranging pumas, of unknown origin, occasionally may be present in Alabama, but there is no self-sustaining population currently known. Both subspecies that occur in the eastern United States (*P. c. coryi* and *P. c. cougar*) were listed as *endangered* by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1967 and 1973, respectively.

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