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WILDERNESS



*The mountain lion
in myth, memory, and life*

Concepts of Cougar

By Chris Bolgiano



In the beginning was the lion. Images of leonine power are as ancient as the first scratchings on cave walls and as ambiguous as the Sphinx. Lions roam through the Bible, emissaries sometimes of God, sometimes of the Devil. From Aristotle's attempts at empirical description to the fanciful symbolism of medieval bestiaries, the lion embodied both the noblest and the most savage traits of humankind.

Lions had been gone from Europe for

more than a millennia by the time Europeans discovered the New World. Bears, wolves, and several species of small wild cats remained, so the analogous animals on new shores were easily comprehended. Large cats, however, were completely foreign. From Columbus on, explorers wrote of lions, leopards, tigers, "ounces," panthers and "pards," confounding real and mythical animals of the Old World with the jaguars, mountain lions, and ocelots that are unique to the New. Of these,

only the mountain lion ranged throughout both hemispheres, including the thirteen colonies. The assimilation of this unknown creature into the collective American consciousness transpired through the workings of what Aldo Leopold called "the mental eye." It is our "perception of the natural processes by which the land and the living things upon it . . . maintain their existence," Leopold wrote, that determines our reaction to them. Or, as Barry Lopez put it in *Of Wolves and Men*, "we create wolves" in the eye of our imagination. In the course of four centuries, the American imagination has created of the mountain lion the most terrifying, the most contemptible, and the most magnificent animal in the American wilderness.

My own mind's eye has fashioned an idea of mountain lion over a period of many years. I can barely remember, as in a dim haze of prehistory, when I was perplexed by the cat of many names. Who were those mysterious and vaguely threatening animals called cougar, puma, panther, catamount, and wild cat? Slowly I etched out a single cat in my mind, the chaos of images resolved into the quintessence of feline grace. The image is with me still: Mountain lions move through my dreams, leaping, bounding, scrabbling over rocky cliffs, padding down sandy streambeds.

The confusion of my early imaginings mirrored distantly the initial confusion of colonists. The idea of lions was so intriguing at first that skins of the elusive creature were sought through friendship or trade with Native Americans. Gradually it became clear that the sleek, stealthy cat that screamed instead of roared, and that never had a mane, was not the lion of fable. Curiosity withered as the thin, short-haired pelts proved of little value in the fur industry. Busy on the frontier, Americans simply substituted one mythical image for another. By the 1670s, settlers were consistently calling their cat a panther. Panthers were vague concepts that for centuries had been inextricably mixed with leopards. Both animals were generally symbols of evil:

Top left: A mountain lion in Montana makes snarling commentary for the photographer. At right is Charles Livingston Bull's elegant rendering of "Puma and Ptarmigans," from CENTURY magazine, November 1913.

TOP LEFT: JEFF FOOTE; RIGHT: LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



the leopard was bloodthirsty; the panther, treacherous. In its lithe body form, its solitary nature, even in the spots that mark it as a kitten, the American mountain lion resembles rather closely the animal we call a leopard today. It was as a panther, sometimes rendered as "painter" in backwoods slang, that the animal became known throughout most of the eastern United States.

Once Americans recognized that this animal was not the lion of myth, a certain disappointment set in. Virginia gentleman William Byrd II expressed the ludicrous in the conflict between myth and reality in 1728 when he called the panther the "absolute monarch of the woods. . . . However, it must be confessed, his voice is a little contemptible for a monarch . . . being not a great deal louder nor more awful than the mewling of a household cat." Eventually the mild, almost disinterested response of panthers to pursuit earned them the label of cowards too abject even to defend themselves. In the world of myth, this was the opposite pole from the courageous lion.

Panthers seem to occupy extremes in the various mythical worlds of Native Americans as well. Sometimes the same culture produced images that embraced both the threat and the beauty of the cat's rippling power. The Southeastern mound builders, for example, incised the dreadful Underwater Panther on shell cups and pottery. This was a monster composed of cougar, snake, and other animal parts that arose from water to hunt on land. Yet other portrayals of the animal are eloquent with beauty. Notable among them is a wooden figurine unearthed from Marco Island, Florida, that has the sinuous lines, round eyes, and delicate nostrils of a living panther. It sits on its haunches in a human posture, graceful and appealing, almost supplicating.

Some Native American cultures produced images that seem reverential, such as the cougars carved from boulders in New Mexico. In others there are hints of uneasiness, even dislike. A Nootka Indian in the Pacific Northwest called the cougar the one animal the Indians did not understand. Charles

A. Eastman, a mixed-blood Sioux from Minnesota who graduated from Dartmouth, published in 1904 an explanation of wild animals from the Indian viewpoint that described the great cats as "unsociable, queer people. Their speech has no charm. They are very bashful and yet dangerous, for no animal can tell what they are up to. If one sees you first, he will not give you a chance to see so much as the tip of his tail. He never makes any noise, for he has the right sort of moccasins."

White settlers absorbed this distrust of the animal's secrecy. They also adopted the Indian taste for cougar flesh, comparing it to mutton and veal. Turnabout was not fair play, however, from the white point of view. Not that panthers ate people with any regularity. Less than half a dozen pioneer deaths have come down through the records as attributed to panthers in the first several centuries of settlement. Panthers preferred hogs. In 1705 the surveyor John Lawson, shortly to burn at an Indian stake for his trespasses, called panthers "the greatest enemy to the planter of any vermine in Carolina." The accusation gains some credence from the accuracy of Lawson's other observations about the panther: that it climbs trees with "the greatest agility imaginable," covers its kill with leaves, purrs like a cat, and is easily treed by "the least cur." This one paragraph contained most of the details that formed the core of knowledge about the animal, as animal, for more than two centuries.

A science of natural history was emerging from a ferment of ideas, but zoology was ignored and panther folklore blossomed in its absence. Naturalists embellished their meager store of facts with rumors and anecdotes. Popular magazines distorted a few accurate biological details with tall tales. Certain motifs emerged: screams like a woman in pain, ambushes from tree limbs, follows humans as prelude to a cowardly attack from the rear, covers sleeping hunters with leaves for later consumption, drinks blood, black in color like the devil's beast. Over and over, the panther was characterized as remarkably cruel and bloodthirsty, the terror of all other creatures except, perhaps, the grizzly bear (and a few stories had panthers vanquishing even them). The culmination of all negative images into one criminal cougar occurred in the mind of Theodore Roosevelt. Although

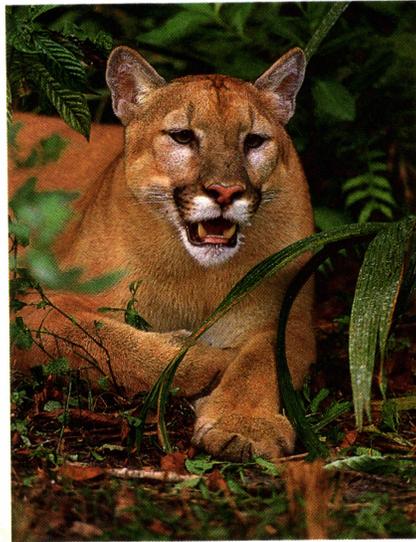
justly credited with placing the new conservation movement on the national agenda, Roosevelt displayed a neurosis about predators in general and cougars in particular. In 1893 he began writing of cougars as beasts “of stealth and rapine . . . craven and cruel . . . as ferocious and bloodthirsty as they are cowardly . . . with evil yellow eyes.” This was the mental image that had resulted by Roosevelt’s time in the virtual extermination of the eastern panther, except in the inaccessible swamps of southern Florida. For decades more, it inspired the implacable predator-control programs in the West that killed lions by the tens of thousands.

So it is remarkable to find a paean of pure aesthetic ecstasy bursting forth only twenty years after Roosevelt’s first essay on the cougar. Charles Livingston Bull, a popular turn-of-the-century magazine artist, painted a gray lion on a snowy mountain ledge, its muscular body surging upward to swat at two ptarmigan. “Oh, the beautiful, splendid, supple, graceful, powerful, silent puma!” he wrote. “I would rather watch and draw and dream about it than about any other living thing.”

At about the same time, Ernest Thompson Seton was gaining immense popularity with his sentimental stories of animals that appealed, for the first time, to the sympathies instead of the sensationalism of a mass audience. As wildlife management began to establish itself as a scientific discipline in the 1930s and 1940s, the place of predators in the natural world was grudgingly acknowledged. After Aldo Leopold described his flash of understanding of “the fierce green fire” in a dying wolf’s eyes, acknowledgment slowly grew into popular appreciation. Like wolves and grizzly bears, cougars began to appear benignly in books, on television, and in movies to an urbanizing audience hungry for a link to the natural world. Nowhere is the change in perception so tellingly revealed as on Madison Avenue. From cars to shoes to knives, cougars today sell a fast, sleek, and sexy power, a steely strength, a matchless beauty.

These positive images did not, of course, drive out the negative ones. Several distinct perceptions of the American mountain lion coexist today, a phenomenon that Harley Shaw calls “concepts of cougar.” Shaw did field research on lions for the Arizona Fish & Game Department from 1970 until his retirement in 1990. His recent

book, *Soul Among Lions*, is an odd one for a scientist. In addition to the expected biological explications, there are intimations of morality and even mysticism. Shaw scrutinizes the motives of each of the lion’s major constituencies: Deer hunters, trophy hunters and



On the opposite page, a Montana mountain lion nurses two-month-old cubs in apparent disregard of the photographer; above is an endangered Florida panther, one of the few dozen still surviving.

OPPOSITE PAGE: ERWIN & PEGGY BAUER;
ABOVE: ART WOLFE

their guides, ranchers, preservationists, researchers. “Biologists often reflect the species they’re studying,” Shaw once mused, “and lion researchers tend to be silent, solitary, and distributed at low densities over large territories.”

Despite any innate reclusiveness, lion biologists from the twelve western states and several Canadian provinces with confirmed lion populations have managed to congregate three times in the last fifteen years. Shaw hosted the Third Mountain Lion Workshop in Prescott, Arizona, in December 1988. Official representatives from British Columbia, California, Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, and Texas reported that lion numbers in their regions were either increasing or were already greater than in many decades. Changes in public attitudes were credited as fully as the elimination of bounties in the 1950s and 1960s and the gradual reduction of sheep farmers, the lion’s most virulent enemy in the West. Maurice Hornocker, venerated as the dean of lion research because he inaugurated the current era of telemetry studies in 1965, has suggested that

across the West cougars have increased by 20 to 40 percent. Nowadays, when Hornocker gives a talk, he titles it: “Mountain Lions: A Carnivore Success Story.”

Others, including Shaw, argue that no field evidence exists to verify the “gut feeling” on which some biologists base their judgment that lions are thriving. Increasing numbers of lion sightings might well document the growing numbers of people in lion habitat rather than lions, and sightings are notoriously inaccurate anyway. The strongest consensus to come out of the third workshop was that field methods for counting cougars were the most pressing research need.

So cryptic are the cats, so inextricably merged into the boulder-strewn or brush-choked landscapes they inhabit, that even after more than twenty years of research biologists still can’t answer a basic management question: How many lions are out there? Enough knowledge has accumulated, however, to redefine panther folklore. Lions do scream like wailing women; they also whistle, chortle, chirp, purr, and meow. They have been known to follow people, for a motive that seems appropriately described as curiosity. No black mountain lion has ever been found in North America.

Radio collars have illuminated the mystery of what lions do in their secret lives, which turns out to be a combination of restless, random roaming through their home range and a lot of sleeping and lazing around after a kill. Even the ultimate mystery, the kill itself, is yielding to knowledge. Unlike wolves, who seem in some subtle way to choose their prey for pursuit, cougars wait in hiding to make a short rush at any animal that happens by. Lions do not ambush from tree limbs, because they could not get leverage for a death grip on the throat or neck; their hind feet must be firmly fixed on the ground. Deer and elk are staples, but lion predation seems generally to affect herd size very little, perhaps only mitigating the more extreme fluctuations that might otherwise take place. Kills are dragged to a protected spot and scratched over with leaves or twigs; it is highly unlikely that any living human being was similarly treated. Lions also eat porcupines, raccoons, rabbits, rodents, reptiles and birds, but people, perhaps because they stand upright on two legs, are not viewed as regular items

of prey. And cougars eat very little livestock, although an individual rancher in good lion habitat can lose high numbers of sheep, or, less frequently, cattle.

Although attacks on humans have increased in recent years, probably because more people are invading lion habitat, such incidents are still extremely rare. Usually the offending lion, tracked down and killed, is found to be too young or too old to catch anything fleetly. Some culprits have shown unmistakable signs of recent release from human captivity. Children, because of their small size and irrepensible motion, are particularly vulnerable. In lion country, it is wise to keep children close by, and if you meet a lion face to face, hold your ground, pick up your child, and make yourself as big as possible. Running seems to trigger the cat's hunting instinct.

Lions desire solitude so deeply that they will spread themselves thinly across the landscape even when food is abundant. Kittens stay with the mother for one to two years, but thereafter show little need for the company of their own kind. The amount of territory a mature male lion needs depends on many circumstances of terrain and varies from 50 square miles in the oak woodlands/chaparral communities of

"We've lost our grizzlies, wolves, condors, and jaguars. The mountain lion is our last majestic predator."

California to 400 square miles in the wet prairies of the Everglades. Territories are occasionally shared by cats of the same sex as well as opposing sexes, although when this occurs the animals almost never meet. Mates consort for only a week or two.

All of the above are rank generalizations; it is difficult to say anything terribly precise about the cougar as a biological concept. In every different research situation, lions have responded in different ways. But it is clear that the general portrait of the cougar that is emerging from biological studies does not easily accede to the overwhelming tendency in our culture toward anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism need not be a bad thing. The belief that animals feel some approximation of human emotions generates much goodwill, and it may even be true.

Cougars, however, are more difficult to portray in human terms than bears, who have been teddified for almost a century, or wolves, whose admirable family life has recently been popularized. Maybe this will make it harder for lions to become truly accepted over the long term, although the fact that Americans now own more cats than dogs may signal a greater tolerance of the independence and aloofness traditionally ascribed to felines.

Acceptance of the cougar reached an apotheosis in California in June of 1990, when voters passed a permanent ban on trophy hunting of mountain lions known as Proposition 117. Lions had not been killed for fun there since 1972, when the legislature approved the first of several temporary moratoriums in response to citizen concern over diminishing populations. (Hunting of lions that killed livestock continued and is permitted under Proposition 117.) Few knowledgeable people today dispute the assessment of the California Department of Fish and Game that lions have increased since 1972, although there are many good reasons to quarrel with the department's specific calculation of 5,100 lions. It was the very fact that tenable populations of lions still existed in California that helped make the ban so attractive. "Must we wait until a species is on the

Vermont Spring

Walking in spring
never far from the sound
of rushing water,
I came to a clearing
in the woods.
A silver birch stood
with me, silent.

A woodpecker beat time,
momentarily,
with my pounding heart,
and, in a marshy pond,
swollen with liquid snows,
something small, unseen,
broke the surface
to breathe the air.

Back in the brittle city,
where voices and corners
are sharp,
the surfaces concrete-hard —
important —
and silence is a memory,
something small, unseen
within me
breaks the surface
to breathe the wooded air.

—LETHA ELLIOTT

Wildsong

Deep Sea Stars

Deep in utter darkness they creep, unknown
To sight, and shoulder the groaning mass of prone
Ocean upon the cold abyssal floor
Miles below the sunny wind-blown roar
Of waves. But no darkness nor ponderous weight
of the deep
Can dim the radiant hungers the sea stars keep.

—GARY E. GARDNER

Under the Sun

A dying snake gleams upright in the sun,
his ribbon stiffened just where he would wriggle,
his curving water patched into dry sunlight.
The small intense suns that were his eyes
slow to twin moons of muted brightness.
Slipping away, his life drifts in the orbs
that lift above. His long skin is still.
What darkness sucks the ripple from his bones,
this lonely filament, so odd and small?
What darkness makes such oddness of us all?

—T. K. ANDRE-EAMES

Before The Frost

Wrapped myself
in the skin
of the earth,
in the souls
of pine needles
longing for the sun.
Stones grew
from my eye sockets.
Ants carried away
the flesh
of my face.
Mule deer feasted
upon the fruit
of my breasts.
Swallows dove
through my ribs,
there,
to taste the sweetness
of the dark soil.

It took years
for the moonlight
to fade the walls
of my skull.
Years
before I was able
to breathe.
Years
before I was able
to find my way
home.

—charlie mehrhoff

Chainsaw

The way it pops and razzes
and grumbles under its breath,
the way it hefts in your grip
then shrieks lickety-split
through the thick log, leaving
the burnt arc in the bit
of log left, the way
it fills the woods
with its angular whang,
smoke drifted like dust
from a battle, the way
it conjures its rage and goes
into whatever lies in its way
makes you wonder often
if it aims to turn on you
like a serpent, or some force
hurled up from underground.
Why else would it bare
its shiny silver teeth and smile,
ready to leap in your hand?

—ROGER JONES

Note: Poetry submissions are welcome. They should be sent, with return postage, to John Daniel, Poetry Editor, 5118 N. Princeton St., Portland, OR 97203.



brink of extinction?" asked Sharon Negri, cofounder of the Mountain Lion Preservation Foundation, a non-profit organization based in Sacramento. In the few years since its inception in 1986, the Foundation has grown to 38,000 members and was a major grassroots force in securing the passage of Proposition 117. "There's something about the mountain lion that goes to the hearts and minds of Californians," said Negri, who was executive director of the organization during the Proposition 117 campaign. "We've lost our grizzlies, wolves, condors, and jaguars. The mountain lion is our last majestic predator. It's the symbol of the old, wild California that we revere." To the mythic power of that symbolism the Foundation added the clarity of science. Brochures, fact sheets, advertisements, and videos portrayed the compelling beauty of the cougar while citing scientific research that "debunked the myths of the lion as a vicious killer that threatened livestock and people."

It was inevitable that the California Department of Fish and Game, sup-

The cat above, stalking its prey somewhere in Washington state, lives up to Charles Livingston Bull's fervent description of "the beautiful, splendid, supple, graceful, powerful, silent puma!" DENVER A. BRYAN

ported in part like every other state wildlife agency by hunters' license fees, should recommend a regulated lion-hunting season. It was to defeat this proposal that Proposition 117 was developed. Several theories currently being bandied about postulate reasons to hunt lions. One hypothesizes that removing resident adult lions will open up territories to younger animals who would otherwise be pushed into the least desirable territories, which often verge on human settlements where lion-human conflicts are likely. To date, no studies support this idea. Another theory claims that lions uncowed by a seasonal scourge of hunters and dogs through the woods will more readily attack humans, although there have been no more attacks in California than in states where lions are routinely hunted.

On the other hand, hunting is indisputably the single greatest cause of death for cougars anywhere. Once good hounds pick up its trail, a lion has very little chance of escape. The irresistible impulse to climb a tree, born perhaps of eons of competition with wolves, makes lions terribly vulnerable. Hunters shoot an animal that is sitting on a limb, composed and calm, peering down at the yelping dogs below. Because Californians view the cougar with a new form of desire that can be gratified only by living trophies, this scenario was rejected.

As if in counterpoint to the New Age vision in California, the cougar is reviled as the biggest little varmint in Texas. The only state that refuses its lions even the minimal protection of game status, which brings hunting seasons and bag limits, Texas allows lions to be shot at any time for any reason. No reports are required. Not long ago a gracious, fragile old lady of 90, who has ranched in west Texas since Pancho Villa raided it, told me how much lovelier that sere

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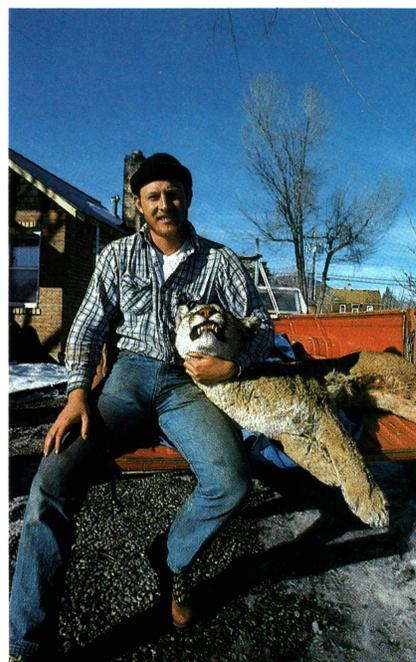


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landscape would be without a single lion in it. Hers was a cattle ranch, and I asked how many head she had lost to lions over the last three quarters of a century. The answer was none. "But what right do lions have," she asked, "to kill the beautiful deer I love to see?"

Conservation groups tried several times during the 1970s to persuade legislators to change the lion's legal status from varmint to game animal, but were stymied by sheep ranchers. Game status is hardly a panacea for protecting an animal, but it would undoubtedly raise lions considerably in the management priorities of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. The current position of the department is that lions are doing so well on their own, as demonstrated by sightings in areas where lions were shot out years ago, that no further study is necessary. Although the department supplied brief reports to each of the three lion workshops, data tables and bar graphs in the published proceedings show Texas as blank lines and wide open spaces.

If California and Texas represent extremes in a continuum of cougars, Florida represents the fulcrum point. The last few dozen disease-ridden, parasitized, incestuous Florida panthers (subspecies *Felis concolor coryi*, on which the eastern name of panther has devolved) survive tenuously in the southwestern part of the state. The theme of habitat loss that colors discussion of lions everywhere turns black and ominous here. The multiagency recovery team is riven by dissension over the captive breeding plan now being implemented and confused by the legal implications of new genetic proof that "pure" Florida panthers have hybridized. Yet there is unanimous agreement that technical and biological problems are not the crucial issues. The fattest and healthiest panthers live on private lands west and south of Lake Okeechobee. These are dry uplands, where pine flatwoods, tangled islands of hardwoods, and the wandering edges that delineate them from surrounding cattle pastures produce far more deer than the wet prairies of public lands in the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp. It helps that private landowners tend to post their property against hunters, who can drive panthers out of their home ranges even if they can't legally hunt the animals (and a small number of hunters will poach panthers regardless of the law). On the other hand, panther researchers, who might confirm the presence of an endangered subspe-



In California it is now illegal to hunt the big cats. But not in Colorado, as the moment of triumph above demonstrates. Hunting is still the largest single cause of death among mountain lions. KENNETH R. BEVIS

cies that needs large expanses of undeveloped habitat, are also refused access.

Development of wetlands is being increasingly regulated in Florida, but the dry uplands are up for grabs. Although wildlife habitat everywhere is being assailed, the development of Florida has become a paradigm for the paving of America. The state's population has doubled since 1960, and an estimated 1,000 people continue to arrive every day. Smoke from landclearing fires smudges the horizon. Trucks laden with rolls of sod for new yards always seem to be blocking the road in front of you. The southward push of the lucrative citrus industry, with its square miles of regimented trees separated by barren strips of mown grass, promises panthers no respite from endless acres of suburbia. "We fully understand that less and less private land will be available to panthers in the future," says Dennis Jordan, coordinator of the recovery effort for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In a region where land prices are astronomical and the terrain requires some of the largest panther home ranges yet documented, the problem cannot be resolved by the traditional fee-simple acquisition of critical habitat. "We

know," Jordan continues, "that public land agencies could never hope to acquire all the habitat that is used by panthers even today, much less what is needed to maintain genetic vitality in the future." The need to involve private landowners is inescapable and urgent. "There must be some landowners who love the land and want to keep it the way it is," Jordan says, "and we've recommended that a program be formulated that would investigate such things as conservation easements and long-term leases. It's going to take a lot of strategizing." Convincing landowners that panthers are as valuable as oranges or winter homes will take little less than a revolution in thought.

There is a segment of society willing to precipitate such a revolution. Audacious as ever, Earth First! has begun to demand that lions (as well as wolves and other extirpated species) be restored to the Appalachians through a system of large, connected preserves. Wildlife experts I've questioned agree that there is no biological reason, now that white-tailed deer have reached superfluity in many second-growth Appalachian forests, why lions couldn't thrive there. Introduced lions could probably weather even the deep snows of the Adirondacks, according to a 1981 study sponsored by the state of New York and the Fish & Wildlife Service, but not the "high level of man-induced mortality." Even in the most isolated areas of Adirondack Park, the report concluded, the roads, dogs, and guns fatal to so many western lions would be too dense to permit lion survival.

Yet for decades there have been dozens, perhaps hundreds, of people every year who, having glimpsed some sort of dusk-colored shape, are convinced that lions roam the crowded east. By the late 1970s the proliferation of sightings, some of them by highly credible observers, had prompted the Fish & Wildlife Service to mount a field search. "Reports were so frequent when I first started my study," says Bob Downing, who led the search, "that I really thought some had survived." But after years of wide-ranging searches, Downing and assistants turned up only a couple of possible cougar tracks and one suspect scat. They couldn't even document any cougars killed by cars, an assured source of death even for sparse Florida panthers. Probably the handful of plausible sightings originated with cats released by owners overwhelmed when the kitten they bought grew up, or by escapees from circuses.

Although there were hints that the native eastern subspecies, *Felis concolor couguar*, might be filtering into the Lake States and New England from Canada, Downing came to believe that it was "virtually impossible" for a viable breeding population of native eastern cougars to have persisted in the United States through the last 50 to 100 years.

The question of whether the eastern subspecies exists is not merely a matter of aesthetics. There is considerable doubt whether the Endangered Species Act, as interpreted by the Fish & Wildlife Service, would embrace lions brought to the east from one of the stable subspecies in the west. Without federal support, state wildlife agencies are unlikely to attempt restoration. Unless the Fish & Wildlife Service takes the lead, then, there's little hope that the ghostly panther will materialize in the east.

In the meantime, people keep seeing panthers. Among my neighbors in the Allegheny foothills are several who be-

come quite irate when I gently suggest that what they saw was most likely a dog or a deer. It is as if an honor has been bestowed on them, one they refuse to relinquish to mere reason. Whatever they actually saw, they insist on perceiving a vision of a wild America they thought their forebears had destroyed. Sometimes at dusk I step out of my house and look toward the rocky slope where one of the last panthers in Virginia was shot. I wonder how it would be to know a panther crouches there again, yellow eyes gleaming, muscles taut, utterly focused. How it would be to accept the risks with understanding and respect, in return for the rightness. A dank breeze slides down Cross Mountain and a chill rises up my back. It would feel, I think, like freedom.

CHRIS BOLGIANO has written for *The Washington Post*, *American Forests*, *Defenders*, and other publications. The historical research for this article was supported by a grant from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy.

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