



Illustration of a Puma concolor

The Cougar.

Male.

FELIS CONCOLOR.—LINN.

THE COUGAR.—PANTHER.

PLATE XCVI.—MALE:—PLATE XCVII.—FEMALE AND YOUNG.

F. immaculata fulva; auriculis nigricantibus, cauda elongatâ, apice nigra neque floccosâ.

CHARACTERS.

Uniformly tawny-yellow; ears, blackish behind; tail, elongated, apex black, without a tuft.

SYNONYMES.

FELIS CONCOLOR, Linn. Syst. Nat., ed. Gmel., 1. p. 79.

“ “ Schreb Saugth., p. 394.

“ “ Buffon, Hist. Nat., t. 9.

“ “ Gonazouara, D'Azara Anim. du Paraguay.

“ “ Desmarest in Nouv. Dict., p. 90, 2.

PUMA, Leo Americanus, Hernandez.

F. CONCOLOR, Cuv. Regne Animal, vol. 1, p. 161

BROWN TIGER, Pennant's Syn. p. 179.

BLACK TIGER, “ “ 180.

F. CONCOLOR, Harlan, Fauna Am., p. 94.

“ “ Godman, vol. 1, p. 291.

“ “ Dekay's Nat. Hist. N. Y., p. 47.

DESCRIPTION.

Body, long and slender; head, small; neck, long; ears, rounded; legs, short and stout; tail, long, slender and cylindrical, sometimes trailing; fur, soft and short.

COLOUR.

Body and legs, of a uniform fulvous or tawny colour; under surface, reddish-white; around the eyes, grayish-yellow; hairs within the ears, yellowish-white; exterior of the ears, blackish; lips, at the moustache, black; throat, whitish; tail of the male, longer than that of the female, brown at tip, not tufted.

We have seen several specimens differing from the above in various shades of colour. These accidental variations, however, are not sufficient to warrant us in regarding these individuals as distinct species.

The young are beautifully spotted and barred with blackish-brown, and their hair is soft and downy.

DIMENSIONS.

Male, shot by J. W. AUDUBON, at Castroville, Texas 28th January, 1846.

				Feet.	Inches
From point of nose to root of tail	-	-	-	5	1
Tail	-	-	-	3	1
Height of ear posteriorly	-	-	-		3
Length of canine teeth, from gums	-	-	-		1 $\frac{3}{4}$

Female, killed 26th January, 1846.

Length of head and body	-	-	-	4	11
" Tail	-	-	-	2	8
" Height of ear	-	-	-		3
" of canine teeth	-	-	-		1 $\frac{1}{2}$

Weight, 149 lbs.

HABITS.

The Cougar is known all over the United States by the name of the panther or painter, and is another example of that ignorance or want of imagination, which was manifested by the "Colonists," who named nearly every quadruped, bird, and fish, which they found on our continent, after species belonging to the Old World, without regard to more than a most slight resemblance, and generally with a total disregard of propriety. This character of the "Colonists," is, we are sorry to say, kept up to a great extent by their descendants, to the present day, who in designating towns and villages throughout the land, have seized upon the names of Rome, Carthage, Palmyra, Cairo, Athens, Sparta, Troy, Babylon, Jericho, and many other ancient cities, as well as those of Boston, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Bristol, Paris, Manchester, Berlin, Geneva, Portland, &c., &c., from which probably some of the founders of our country towns may have emigrated. We sincerely hope this system of nomenclature will henceforth be discarded; and now let us go back to the Cougar, which is but little more like the true *panther* than an opossum is like the kangaroo! Before, however, entirely quitting this subject, we may mention that for a long time the Cougar was thought to be the lion; the supposition was that all the skins of the animal that were brought into the settlements by the Indians were skins of females; and the lioness, having something

the same colour and but little mane, it occurred to the colonists that the skins they saw could belong to no other animal!

The Cougar is found sparsely distributed over the whole of North America up to about latitude 45°. In former times this animal was more abundant than at present, and one was even seen a few miles from the city of New-York within the recollection of Dr. DEKAY, who speaks of the consternation occasioned by its appearance in Westchester County, when he was a boy.

The Cougar is generally found in the very wildest parts of the country, in deep wooded swamps, or among the mountain cliffs and chasms of the Alleghany range. In Florida he inhabits the miry swamps and the watery everglades; in Texas, he is sometimes found on the open prairies, and his tracks may be seen at almost every cattle-crossing place on the sluggish bayous and creeks with their quick-sands and treacherous banks. At such places the Cougar sometimes finds an unfortunate calf, or perhaps a cow or bullock, that has become fast in the oozy, boggy earth, and from exhaustion has given up its strugglings, and been drowned or suffocated in the mire.

This species at times attacks young cattle, and the male from which our drawing was made, was shot in the act of feeding upon a black heifer which he had seized, killed, and dragged into the edge of a thicket close adjoining the spot. The Cougar, is however, generally compelled to subsist on small animals, young deer, skunks, raccoons, &c., or birds, and will even eat carrion when hard pressed by hunger. His courage is not great, and unless very hungry, or when wounded and at bay, he seldom attacks man.

J. W. AUDUBON was informed, when in Texas, that the Cougar would remain in the vicinity of the carcase of a dead horse or cow, retiring after gorging himself, to a patch of tall grasses, or brambles, close by, so as to keep off intruders, and from which lair he could return when his appetite again called him to his dainty food. In other cases he returns, after catching a pig or calf, or finding a dead animal large enough to satisfy his hungry stomach, to his accustomed haunts, frequently to the very place where he was whelped and suckled.

Dr. DEKAY mentions, that he was told of a Cougar in Warren County, in the State of New-York, that resorted to a barn, from whence he was repeatedly dislodged, and finally killed. "He shewed no fight whatever, His mouth was found to be filled with the spines of the Canada porcupine, which was probably the cause of his diminished wariness and ferocity, and would in all probability have finally caused his death."

The panther, or "painter," as the Cougar is called, is a nocturnal ani-

mal more by choice than necessity, as it can see well during the day time. It steals upon its intended prey in the darkness of night, with a silent, cautious step, and with great patience makes its noiseless way through the tangled thickets of the deepest forest. When the benighted traveller, or the wearied hunter may be slumbering in his rudely and hastily constructed bivouac at the foot of a huge tree, amid the lonely forest, his fire nearly out, and all around most dismal, dreary, and obscure, he may perchance be roused to a state of terror by the stealthy tread of the prowling Cougar; or his frightened horse, by its snortings and struggles to get loose, will awaken him in time to see the glistening eyes of the dangerous beast glaring upon him like two burning coals. Lucky is he then, if his coolness does not desert him, if his trusty rifle does not miss, through his agitation, or snap for want of better flint; or well off is he, if he can frighten away the savage beast by hurling at him a blazing brand from his nearly extinguished camp-fire. For, be sure the animal has not approached him without the gnawing hunger—the desire for blood; engendered by long fasting and gaunt famine. Some very rare but not well authenticated instances have been recorded in our public prints, where the Cougar at such times has sprang upon the sleeper. At other times the horses are thrown into such a fright, that they break all fastenings and fly in every direction. The late Mr. ROBERT BEST of Cincinnati, wrote to Dr. GODMAN, that one of these animals had surprised a party of travellers, sprung upon the horses, and so lacerated with its claws and teeth their flanks and buttocks, that they with the greatest difficulty succeeded in driving the poor creatures before them next morning, to a public house some miles off. This party, however, had no fire, and were unarmed.

A planter on the Yazoo river, some years ago, related the following anecdote of the Cougar to us. As he was riding home alone one night, through the woods, along what is called a "bridle-path" (i. e. a horse-track), one of these animals sprang at him from a fallen log, but owing to his horse making a sudden plunge forward, only struck the rump of the gallant steed with one paw, and could not maintain his hold. The gentleman was for a moment unable to account for the furious start his horse had made, but presently turning his head saw the Cougar behind, and putting spurs to his horse, galloped away. On examining the horse, wounds were observed on his rump corresponding with the claws of the Cougar's paw, and from their distance apart, the foot must have been spread widely when he struck the animal.

Another respectable gentleman of the State of Mississippi gave us the following account. A friend of his, a cotton planter, one evening, while at tea, was startled by a tremendous outcry among his dogs, and ran out



Drawn in Water by W. J. Audubon

The Cougar

Female & Young

Engraved from Nature by J. W. Audubon

Lith. Printed & Col'd by J. T. Bowen, Phil.

to quiet them, thinking some person, perhaps a neighbour, had called to see him. The dogs could not be driven back, but rushed into the house; he seized his horsewhip, which hung inside the hall door, and whipped them all out, as he thought, except one, which ran under the table. He then took a candle and looking down, to his surprise and alarm discovered the supposed refractory dog to be a Cougar. He retreated instantaneously, the females and children of his family fled frightened half out of their senses. The Cougar sprang at him, he parried the blow with the candlestick, but the animal flew at him again, leaping forward perpendicularly, striking at his face with the fore-feet, and at his body with the hind-feet. These attacks he repelled by dealing the Cougar straight-forward blows on its belly with his fist, lightly turning aside and evading its claws, as he best could. The Cougar had nearly overpowered him, when luckily he backed toward the fire-place, and as the animal sprang again at him, dodged him, and the panther almost fell into the fire; at which he was so terrified that he endeavoured to escape, and darting out of the door was immediately attacked again by the dogs, and with their help and a club was killed.

Two raftsmen on the Yazoo river, one night encamped on the bank, under a small tent they carried with them, just large enough to cover two. They had a merry supper, and having made a large fire, retired, "turned in" and were soon fast asleep. The night waned, and by degrees a drizzling rain succeeded by a heavy shower pattering on the leaves and on their canvas roof, which sheltered them from its fury, half awakened one of them, when on a sudden the savage growl of a Cougar was heard, and in an instant the animal pounced upon the tent and overthrew it. Our raftsmen did not feel the full force of the blow, as the slight poles of the tent gave way, and the impetus of the spring carried the Panther over them; they started up and scuffled out of the tent without further notice "to quit," and by the dim light of their fire, which the rain had nearly extinguished, saw the animal facing them and ready for another leap; they hastily seized two of the burning sticks, and whirling them around their heads with loud whoops, scared away the midnight prowler. After this adventure they did not, however, try to sleep under their tent any more that night!

We have given these relations of others to show that at long intervals, and under peculiar circumstances, when perhaps pinched with hunger, or in defence of its young, the Cougar sometimes attacks men. These instances, however, are very rare, and the relations of an affrightened traveller must be received with some caution, making a due allowance for a natural disposition in man to indulge in the marvellous.

Our own experience in regard to the habits of this species is somewhat limited, but we are obliged to state that in the only three instances in which we observed it in its native forests, an impression was left on our minds that it was the most cowardly of any species of its size belonging to this genus. In our boyhood, whilst residing in the northern part of New-York, forty-eight years ago, on our way to school through a wood, a Cougar crossed the path not ten yards in front of us. We had never before seen this species, and it was, even at that early period, exceedingly rare in that vicinity. When the Cougar observed us he commenced a hurried retreat; a small terrier that accompanied us gave chase to the animal, which, after running about a hundred yards, mounted an oak and rested on one of its limbs about twenty feet from the ground. We approached and raised a loud whoop, when he sprang to the earth and soon made his escape. He was, a few days afterwards, hunted by the neighbours and shot. Another was treed at night, by a party on a raccoon hunt; supposing it to be a raccoon, one of the men climbed the tree, when the Cougar leaped to the ground, overturning one of the young hunters that happened to be in his way, and made his escape. A third was chased by cur-dogs in a valley in the vicinity of the Catskill mountains, and after half an hour's chase ascended a beech-tree. He placed himself in a crotch, and was fired at with duck-shot about a dozen times, when he was finally killed, and fell heavily to the ground. A Mr. RANDOLPH, of Virginia, related to us an amusing anecdote of a rencontre which he and a Kentuckian had in a valley of one of the Virginia mountains with a Cougar. This occurrence took place about thirty years ago. They had no guns, but meeting him near the road, they gave chase with their horses, and after a run of a few hundred yards he ascended a tree. RANDOLPH climbed the tree, and the Cougar sprang down, avoiding the Kentuckian, who stood ready to attack him with his club. The latter again followed, on his horse, when he treed him a second time. RANDOLPH again climbed after him, but found the animal was coming down, and disposed to fight his way to the ground. He stunned him with a blow, when the Cougar let go his hold, fell to the earth, and was killed by his comrade, who was waiting with his club below.

From all the conversations we have had with hunters who were in the habit of killing the Cougar, we have been brought to the conviction that a man of moderate courage, with a good rifle and a steady arm, accompanied by three or four active dogs, a mixture of either the fox-hound or grey-hound, might hunt the Cougar with great safety to himself, and with a tolerable prospect of success.

This animal, which has excited so much terror in the minds of the igno-

rant and timid, has been nearly exterminated in all our Atlantic States, and we do not recollect a single well authenticated instance where any hunter's life fell a sacrifice in a Cougar hunt.

Among the mountains of the head-waters of the Juniatta river, as we were informed, the Cougar is so abundant, that one man has killed for some years, from two to five, and one very hard winter, he killed seven. In this part of the country the Cougar is hunted with half-bred hounds, the full-blooded dogs lacking courage to attack so large and fierce looking an animal when they overtake it. The hunt is conducted much in the manner of a chase after the common wild-cat. The Cougar is "treed" after running about fifteen or twenty minutes, and generally shot, but sometimes it shews fight before it takes to a tree, and the hunters consider it great sport: we heard of an instance of one of these fights, in which the Cougar got hold of a dog, and was killing it, when the hunter in his anxiety to save his dog, rushed upon the Cougar, seized him by the tail and broke his back with a single blow of an axe.

According to the relations of old hunters, the Cougar has three or four young at a litter. We have heard of an instance of one being found, a very old female, in whose den there were five young, about as large as cats, we believe, however, that the usual number of young, is two.

The dens of this species are generally near the mouth of some cave in the rocks, where the animal's lair is just far enough inside to be out of the rain; and not in this respect like the dens of the bear, which are sometimes ten or twelve yards from the opening of a large crack or fissure in the rocks. In the Southern States, where there are no caves or rocks, the lair of the Cougar is generally in a very dense thicket, or in a cane-brake. It is a rude sort of bed of sticks, weeds, leaves, and grasses or mosses, and where the canes arch over it; as they are evergreen, their long pointed leaves turn the rain at all seasons of the year. We have never observed any bones or fragments of animals they had fed upon, at the lairs of the Cougar, and suppose they always feed on what they catch near the spot where they capture the prey.

The tales related of the cry of the Cougar in the forest in imitation of the call of a lost traveller, or the cry of a child, must be received with much caution, and may in many of their exaggerations be set down as vulgar errors. In a state of captivity, we have never heard the male uttering any other note than a low growl; the female, however, we have frequently heard uttering a kind of mewing like that of a cat, but a more prolonged and louder note, that could be heard at the distance of about two hundred yards. All the males, however, of the cat kind, at the season when the sexes seek each other, emit remarkable and startling cries,

as is evidenced by the common cat, in what is denominated caterwauling. We have observed the same habit in the leopard, the ocelot, and in our two species of lynx. It is not impossible, therefore, that the male Cougar, may at the rutting season have some peculiar and startling notes. The cries, however, to which persons have from time to time directed our attention, as belonging to the Cougar, we were well convinced were uttered by other animals. In one instance, we ascertained them to proceed from a red fox which was killed in the hunt, got up for the purpose of killing the Cougar. In other cases the screams of the great horned, the barred, or the screech owl are mistaken for the cries of this animal.

The female Cougar is a most affectionate mother, and will not leave her young cubs, unless occasionally to procure food to support her own strength; she therefore often becomes very lean and poor. The female we have figured, was in this condition; we procured one of her cubs and figured it, presenting its beautiful spots, seldom before noticed. The other made its escape.

The whelps are suckled by the dam until about half grown, and then hunt with the old ones (which generally go in pairs) until the mother is with young again, or the young ones find mates for themselves, and begin to breed.

The period of gestation of the Cougar is ninety-seven days, as has been ascertained at the Zoological Society of London, (Proceedings, 1832, p. 62.) In the Northern and Middle States, the young are produced in the spring. In the Southern States, however, where the animal is supplied with an abundance of food, and not much incommoded by the cold, the young have in some instances been discovered in autumn. J. W. AUDUBON found, in Texas, young Cougars nearly half grown in February.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION.

This species has a wide geographical range. It was formerly found in all the Northern and Eastern States, and we have seen a specimen procured in Upper Canada. The climates of Lower Canada, New Foundland, and Labrador, appear to be too cold for its permanent residence. In all the Atlantic States it was formerly found, and a few still exist in the less cultivated portions. It is occasionally shot in the extensive swamps, along the river courses of Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana; it is found sparingly on the whole range of the Alleghanies, running through a considerable portion of the United States. It has crossed the Rocky Mountains, and exists on the Pacific, in Oregon and California; it is quite abundant in Florida and Texas; is found within the

tropics in Mexico, and Yucatan, and has penetrated through Panama into Guyana and South America, where it is sometimes called the Puma.

GENERAL REMARKS.

The variations of size, to which this species is subject, have created much confusion among our books of Natural History, and added a considerable number of supposed new species. After having examined very carefully very many specimens, both in a prepared state, and alive in menageries, procured in most parts of North and South America, we have arrived at the conclusion that the Cougar of North America and the Puma of our Southern Continent are one and the same species, and cannot even be regarded as varieties.



Audubon, John James and Bachman, John. 1851. "Felis concolor, Cougar [Pl. XCVII, female and young]." *The quadrupeds of North America* 2, 305–313.
<https://doi.org/10.5962/p.322407>.

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