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## **Los Angeles' Lonely Lion: A Story of Hope**

All great things are wound up with all things little. How did a mountain lion's plight lead to the funding efforts for an urban wildlife corridor right in the Los Angeles' Zoo backyard? This is the story of P22 the mountain lion of Griffith Park – the world's most urban park and home to the Hollywood sign.

Mountain lions are solitary unless mating or parenting. Her kittens will leave their mother's home range sometime during their second year. A male mountain lions home range can vary from 25 to 500 square miles. Female home range can be 8 to over 400 square miles. Being a good mountain lion, when P22 was about two years old, he became a transient lion. He left his home in the Santa Monica Mountains and traveled nearly 20 miles east to find unclaimed space and plenty of deer to eat. Traveling east he went through neighborhoods featured on the Hollywood Stars map of homes. Eventually, somehow, he traversed his way across the eight lane highway known as the 405 (the busiest highway in the nation) then successfully navigated the busy 101 freeway and eventually settled in Griffith Park; the backyard of the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens. He now lives on a virtual island of 6 square miles – much less space than the average 100 sq mile home range -- trapped between the intersection of three of the busiest freeways in the nation: the 101, the 5, and the 405. P22 has plenty of food; mule deer, being his preferred diet but no chance of reproduction. Even though P22 found his own home range away from dominate males, his dispersal is not considered successful because he is living on an island with no opportunities for reproduction.

Miguel Ordenana a young conservationist biologist, discovered P22 in 2012 during a Griffith Park connectivity study using camera traps to determine if Griffith Park really was an island. While they were setting up the camera traps they did not even contemplate the possibility of capturing a mountain lion; they thought it likely to find some bob cats and if they were lucky a grey fox. Imagine Miguel's surprise when reviewing the camera traps and seeing not a cat with a bobbed tail but a large cat with a tail measuring 2/3 of its head and body. After getting over his surprise, and confirming the picture was indeed a mountain lion, Miguel shared his findings with the National Park Service. The National Park Service along with Miguel set about the task of capturing the mountain lion, naming him and fitting him with a radio collar.

Once the first pictures of P22 were published he captured the hearts and imaginations of Angelinos. We track him, hope for him, and gave him his own Twitter account and through his ambassador status we have opened up two very important conversations about living with urban carnivores and the need for wildlife corridors.

The first conversation has focused on or use of rodenticide, commonly known as rat poisons, which is killing our local wildlife. The food chain consuming the poisoned rodents includes golden eagles, great horned owls, foxes, coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions. While we know P22 is living peacefully with us and staying out of our way, it hasn't been as seamless for him. In March 2014, after living within Griffith Park for 2 years, P22 was captured to replace the battery in his GPS radio-collar. During that capture biologists discovered he was severely ill with notoedric mange. Blood tests taken confirmed that P22 was exposed to multiple rat poisons, probably from eating a small mammal that had ingested rat poison. Sadly this was not the first case of documented mange from rat poisoning. Two other free-ranging mountain lions in the Simi Valley hills died as a result of rat poisoning. P22 was given treatment and at this point, based on a number of pictures and video footage, Jeff Sikich from the NPS is optimistic that P22 has recovered, saying; "His face looks good and he has a full belly". P22 was lucky that his radio collar needed a new battery when it did and he was able to get the medication he needed.

The second conversation about the need for wildlife corridors is one that biologists have been pursuing for years. Our urban wildlife critically needs corridors connecting the Santa Monica Mountains to the Simi Hills and Santa Susana Mountains which have large areas of undeveloped open space. Without it, as Alison Hunt put it, the Santa Monica mountain lions exist in a "web of rivalry, slaughter and incest". But with P22's successful crossing – a journey at least 12 others have died trying – and his large fan base, there is new support for the cause. This new support has generated a one-million dollar grant to the State Coastal Commission of California for the design and permitting of the crossing. Fundraising has started in conjunction with the National Wildlife Foundation (with the goal of being shovel ready by 2018.) This corridor will probably come too late to help P22. He will most likely live out his days in Griffith Park. Now Los Angeles needs to prove to P22 his journey wasn't for naught.

All great things are wound up with all things little. Miguel, who grew up down the street from Griffith Park, became a student volunteer at the LA Zoo, received his degrees and then stayed in this area to help the urban wildlife in his backyard. Through his efforts P22 was located. Now because of P22's successful run across the freeway, backyard conservation is happening. Every time P22's story is told somebody might think twice before using rat poison, or they may join the #saveLACougars campaign, or spend a year capturing that one image that creates a buzz, as National Geographic photographer Steve

Winter did. As the Swedish saying goes, “many small streams make a big river”. Let’s make a big river in our backyard.

From P22’s Twitter account:

*@P22MountainLion: All this talk about #sharkweek. Whatever. Call me when a shark moves into a huge park in the middle of a city.*

## **Sources**

### **General Facts:**

Cougar: The American Lion by Kevin Hansen; Northland Publishing

<http://mountainlion.org/FAQfrequentlyaskedquestions.asp>

<http://www.urbancarnivores.com/>

### **Santa Monica Mountains: P1 – P35 Family Tree:**

<http://www.urbancarnivores.com/mountain-lions-1/>

<http://www.urbancarnivores.com/mountain-lions-1-1/>

### **Take Action:**

<http://www.mountainlion.org/contributetakeaction.asp>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b45z6iPCqLc> (citizen science)

[http://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Regional/California/SaveLACougars\\_California\\_NWF.pdf](http://www.nwf.org/~media/PDFs/Regional/California/SaveLACougars_California_NWF.pdf)

### **Rat Poison:**

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<http://blog.nwf.org/2014/04/los-angeles-mountain-lion-survives-freeways-now-threatened-by-poison-exposure/>

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### **Wild Life Crossings:**

<http://www.urbancarnivores.com/>

<http://www.nwf.org/What-We-Do/Protect-Wildlife/Protecting-Mountain-Lions.aspx>

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