

COUGAR SIGHTING?

Possible mountain lion prints studied by state game officials

State game officials have taken plaster casts of paw prints thought to be those of a mountain lion sighted in Monmouth. The evidence was gathered at a spot where a Monmouth man said he saw two cougar-like animals in mid-September.

The animals, believed to be a mountain lion and her cub, were reported seen in mid-September by Roddy Glover, 39, in a heavily wooded area divided by railroad tracks between routes 132 and 135 near the Monmouth municipal transfer station.

"It was a week before bow hunting season and I was scouting for deer," Glover said. "Actually, I had broken my ankle shortly before and was looking for a good area to set up a ground blind when this occurred." Glover was standing in a ditch just off a railroad trestle and leaning up against a metal fence when he heard the clicking sounds of something stepping on crushed stone.

"I moved out to take a look, thinking it might be a deer," he said. "At first, I thought it was a large bobcat walking toward me about 150 yards away. It was taking its sweet time walking down the tracks — not a care in the world. But it looked too weird to be a bobcat."

The large feline turned broadside, and Glover realized it was not alone. He believes it was a mountain lion with a smaller cub trailing behind. He froze and felt his heart sink deep down into his chest as fear gripped him.

He focused on the larger cat. He doesn't recall paying much attention to the smaller animal.

"I wasn't sure if it would attack to protect its young. I didn't know what they would do," he said. "I couldn't run because of my ankle. I just lay down behind some ferns."

Grover, a taxidermist who has mounted a fair number of bobcats for display, said he once tanned a mountain lion once for a client, so he is familiar with their appearance.

He said the cats were in an area literally infested with deer.

A mountain lion will usually attack a deer by grasping the



**Maine
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shoulders and neck with the front paws, claws extended, digging its hind claws into the deer's the flanks. The cat then bites the back of the deer's neck, breaking its spinal cord and killing it.

Mountain lions often drag their prey to a sheltered area, covering the kill with soil, leaves, grass and other debris and returning later to feed.

Grover said he watched both cats unnoticed for more than 20 minutes. At one point, they came within 50 yards of him before moving off into woods.

"I distinctly remember the wind being in my favor so they couldn't smell me," he said.

Glover said the cougars were reddish-brown in color. The larger animal was about the size of an adult Labrador retriever, and the smaller cat itself could have weighed 40 to 50 pounds.

"I had a very good view, and they definitely had a long tail," he said. "There's no question in my mind I was looking at two mountain lions. They can say I'm crazy. I don't care. I just wish I'd had my camera along with me."

He immediately called district game warden Kevin Anderson to report the sighting.

Anderson, in turn, contacted assistant regional wildlife biologist Keel Kemper at his Sidney Office. Kemper, along with 20-year warden veteran and investigator Philip A. Dugus Jr. met with Glover within an hour of the sighting.

Dugus said he was reluctant to believe Glover at first and went along just to observe. He changed his mind when he saw the cats' prints in mud at the scene.

"The tracks were too big to have been made by bobcat, even a big one," he said. "There were a couple hundred tracks within the area. There was a three-to-four-foot distance between paw strides. I can tell you they



Staff photo / DWAYNE

Roddy Glover, of Monmouth, points to several large paw tracks. Assistant regional wildlife biologist Keel Kemper.

weren't made by a coyote, wolf, or lynx. I believe Mr. Glover. You can't discount every sighting before you start adding a little credibility to the evidence."

Kemper, who agreed, made several plaster molds of the large tracks, both front and rear paws, found well-formed in mud.

"I'm confident it's a very large cat track," he said. "We have fairly solid physical evidence given to us by a credible witness that the tracks were made by a large cat, possibly a mountain lion. Mr. Glover's findings are the most solid piece of cougar evidence we've ever had." Kemper said the front paw prints measured 4 inches in length and 3½ inches across. Dugus questioned whether the creature is a wild feline or one domestically raised and released into the wild to fend for itself.

"If it is a mountain lion, where did it come from?" he asked. "It's illegal to introduce any exotic species in Maine without a permit sanctioned by our department. At this time I know of six domesticated cougars within striking distance."

Glover believes the cats are wild.

"My question is, if there was a female cat with a cub, there's a good chance there's a male around as well. I

can't believe someone would purposely release two cougars, especially getting rid of a kitten."

Having gotten about as much as possible out of Glover's sighting, thought this might be just another unconfirmed report. Not at DIF&W headquarters in Sidney on Thursday, we showed several paw casts to Warden Christopher Simmons of Monmouth and District Warden Danie Murray, of Belgrade.

Both men were unaware of Glover's sighting.

"It's one heck of a big cat track," said Simmons. "What do you think?" Murray was equally surprised.

"It's a big cat track," he said. "One of the biggest I've ever seen. It's not a coyote track, that's for sure."

Mountain lions, or cougars, are currently on the Federal Endangered Species list. Anyone who captures, kills, or injures a mountain lion would be subject to the same penalty as someone harming a bald eagle.

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Having written about other possible cougar sightings, we thought this might be just another unconfirmed report. Not so. At DIF&W headquarters in Sidney on Thursday, we showed several of the paw casts to Warden Sgt. Christopher Simmons of Morrill and District Warden Daniel G. Murray, of Belgrade.

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Staff photo / JIM EVA

Roddy Glover, of Monmouth, says this cast of a large cat paw found in Monmouth was made by one of two mountain lions he spotted last September.