GPS collar documents puma's travels from mountains to Mountain View

May 9 2014, by Guy Lasnier

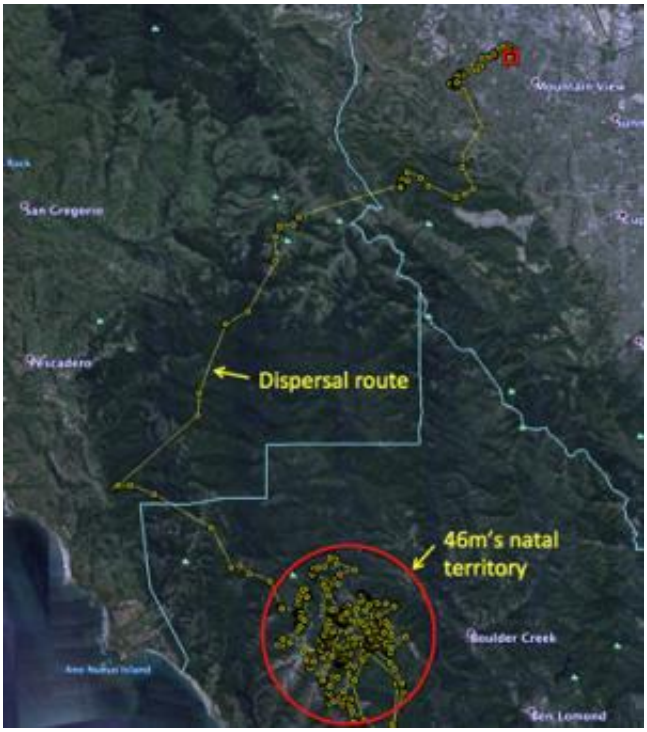
Mountain lion 46M in a tree before his first capture in January 2014. He's called 46M because he's a male and the 46th puma captured and collared by the Santa Cruz Puma Project. Credit: Sean McCain

(Phys.org) —Forty-six M (46M) is a young puma on the move. A GPS tracking collar that UC Santa Cruz scientists placed around his neck reveals exactly where he goes.

The adolescent's effort to stretch his legs and establish his own territory took him into the heart of downtown Mountain View earlier this week. Chris Wilmers, UCSC associate professor of environmental studies, points to an on-screen map in his office that shows how 46M took off two weeks ago from his mom's territory near Big Basin in the Santa Cruz Mountains, a behavior known as "dispersal."

Wilmers is able to provide a detailed look at 46M's travels from data downloaded from the collar after he tranquilized him with a dart in the garage of a Mountain View apartment building Tuesday evening (May 6). The collar, developed by UCSC scientists records and transmits data about the animals movements.

Wilmer recounts 46M's journey in a blog post at Santa Cruz Puma Project's website. The puma project is a joint study by UC Santa Cruz and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife that follows mountain lions in the Santa Cruz mountains as they negotiate the intersections of natural habitat and human intrusion. Approximately 15 pumas are being tracked currently.

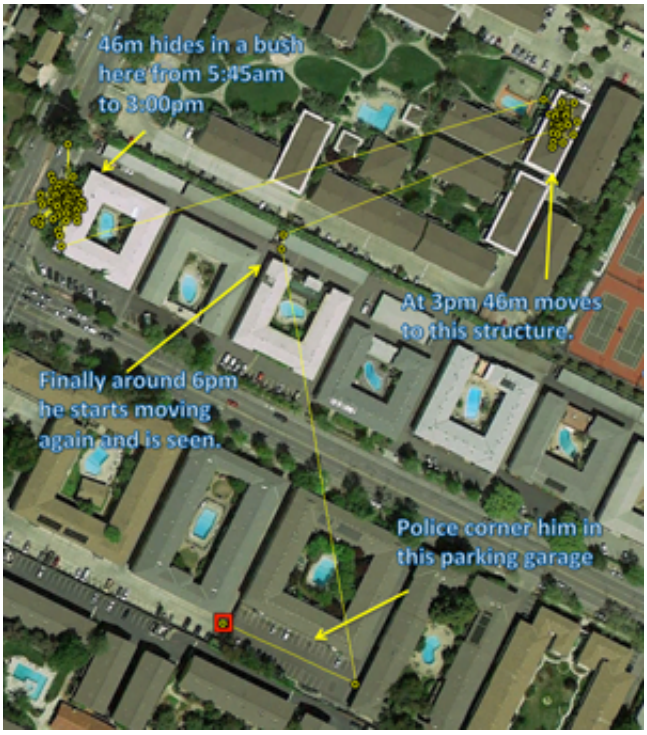


GPS data show how the young puma traveled from his natal area west of Boulder Creek, arriving in Mountain View about two weeks later. Times between plot points range from five minutes to four hours. Yellow lines linking points don't necessarily replicate his exact route. Credit: Puma Project

The 13-month-old cat had spent more than two days in Mountain View, keeping himself hidden until he made a break for it. Data show he spent several daylight hours Tuesday hunkered down in some bushes alongside an apartment building. Pedestrians and motorists just feet away were none the wiser.

"He spent two nights and parts of three days wandering around this highly developed area, and no one had seen him," Wilmers said.

GPS data show the puma first moved north from his home territory April 24, then east, eventually crossing Interstate 280 before dropping into Mountain View.



In Mountain View, data show how the puma hid alongside a busy street for nearly 10 hours before making a move. Credit: Santa Cruz Puma Project

The mountain lion's suburban escapade attracted several hundred spectators as Mountain View police blocked the area, sent out text alerts, and trained their rifles on the animal hiding under a parked car.

Wilmers and his team first captured and collared 46M in January. His brother 41M was captured and collared last October. Remote video before researchers arrived at the capture site showed 46M teasing his brother inside a cage baited with a deer carcass. Other video in February shows 46M feeding on a deer alongside his uncollared mom.

This street view shows 46M's hiding place next to an apartment building and busy street. Credit: Santa Cruz Puma Project

After 46M's second capture, Wilmers and his team transported the 110-pound puma back into the Santa Cruz mountains where he will resume his quest for a territory of his own. Wilmers said data from the collar will continue to show his whereabouts.

Provided by University of California - Santa Cruz

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