

Elusive mountain lion captivates LA then quickly vanishes

April 14 2015, by Raquel Maria Dillon And John Rogers



This frame from video shows officials from the National Park Service preparing to enter the crawl space of a house looking for a mountain lion in Los Angeles on Tuesday, April 14, 2015. A thorough check turned up no sign of the big cat known as P-22 under the residence in the hilly Los Feliz neighborhood, said Lt. J.C. Healy of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. The mountain lion that lounged under a Los Angeles home for hours and refused to budge for bean bags, tennis balls and prods has wandered out on its own, wildlife officials said Tuesday. (AP Photo/Raquel Maria Dillon)

A celebrity mountain lion transformed a wealthy hillside neighborhood into a paparazzi-like scene of scrambling photographers before eluding everyone Tuesday and quietly slipping away.

The 125-pound beast, easily recognizable by the collar and ear tag wildlife officials placed on him a few years ago, has been seen from time to time roaming the hillsides overlooking downtown Los Angeles. In 2013, National Geographic published a glamorous action shot of the mountain lion on the prowl near the Hollywood sign.

On Monday, a worker installing a home security system at James Archinaco's house found the animal lounging in a crawl space.

"He came up, and he was like, 'Mr. Jason, you have a mountain lion in your house!' And that's where it all started," Archinaco said Tuesday.

Soon, [wildlife officials](#) were throwing beanbags and tennis balls at the lion known as P-22, trying to flush him out as TV news photographers jockeyed for position. Within hours, the event was being broadcast live.

The lion, meanwhile, remained indifferent until everyone eventually gave up and left. Then he did, too.

"He felt safe in that hole. But once everyone took off last night, the lion removed himself and probably went back to his natural habitat," said Lt. J. C. Healy of the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Although he generally keeps to himself, it was far from the mountain lion's first encounter with humans.



This Nov. 2014 file photo provided by the National Park Service shows the Griffith Park mountain lion known as P-22. The mountain lion that's a local celebrity has moved in under a Los Angeles home, and despite wildlife workers using a prod and firing tennis balls and bean bags at it, it appears unwilling to move. The animal, which has a red ear tag, is known as P-22 and normally lives in nearby Griffith Park. P-22 arrived in the area several years ago from the Santa Monica Mountains and crossed two freeways to get there. (National Park Service, via AP, File)

He was captured when the tag was put on, and he's been treated successfully for mange. All of that might have given him more skill at evading capture again.

Wildlife officials have used remote cameras to study the lion's behavior since discovering him in the park in March 2012.

Despite being in the heart of the city, Griffith Park is not an altogether

unusual place for a mountain lion to take up residence. With more than 50 miles of hiking trails that wind through chaparral-covered canyons and over hillsides, it bills itself as the largest urban wilderness in the United States.

At the same time, it backs up against neighborhoods of multimillion-dollar hillside homes with killer views. If P-22 looked to his right when he exited that crawl space, he would have seen much of Hollywood laid out before him.

What's most amazing about the animal's tenure in the park, however, is that he somehow got there by crossing Interstate 405 and U.S. Route 101—two of the nation's busiest freeways.

Native to North America, [mountain lions](#) once roamed much of the country but have been eliminated by hunters and ranchers in all but the West and Florida.

Some 5,000 exist in California, according to the Bureau of Land Management. They're usually found in the state's coastal mountains, Sierra Nevada and southern deserts.



This Nov. 2014 file photo provided by the National Park Service shows a newly released image of the Griffith Park mountain lion known as P-22. The mountain lion that's a local celebrity has moved in under a Los Angeles home, and despite wildlife workers using a prod and firing tennis balls and bean bags at it, it appears unwilling to move. The animal, which has a red ear tag, is known as P-22 and normally lives in nearby Griffith Park. P-22 arrived in the area several years ago from the Santa Monica Mountains and crossed two freeways to get there. (National Park Service via AP,File)

Griffith Park is at the eastern end of the Santa Monica Mountains, which extend west to the Pacific Ocean.

During his time in the park, P-22 apparently has existed on mule deer, raccoon and coyote.

Mountain lion attacks on people are extremely rare, with the state wildlife agency documenting only 14 since 1986, three of which were

fatal. California's last deadly mountain lion attack was in 2004.

Archinaco indicated he didn't really mind having P-22 as a houseguest, though he's just as happy the lion took off.

"In one way, you want him to be gone in the sense that then everybody leaves, all the news media leaves," he said.

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