

Famous mountain lion may have killed Los Angeles Zoo koala

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This Nov. 2014 file photo provided by the National Park Service shows the Griffith Park mountain lion known as P-22. Officials believe P-22, the wild mountain lion that prowls Griffith Park in Los Angeles, made a meal of a koala found mauled to death at the LA Zoo. The zoo's director, said this week that workers found the koala's body outside its pen March 3. (National Park Service, via AP, File)

A well-known mountain lion that prowls a sprawling Los Angeles park

may have made a meal of a koala found mauled to death at the city's zoo.

Los Angeles Zoo officials say the koala went missing on March 3 and its bloody, partially eaten remains were found a short time later found outside the zoo.

The night before the koala was found, a 7-year-old male puma known as P-22 was seen on black and white surveillance video near the zoo inside Griffith Park, the sprawling urban wilderness that he calls home.

The big cat may have managed to leap a 9-foot-high fence to reach the koala enclosure and snatch Killarney, a 14-year-old female that was the oldest koala in the exhibit.

She had a habit of leaving the trees and wandering around on the ground at night, zookeepers said.

However, the evidence is circumstantial, zoo director John Lewis and other officials acknowledged Thursday.

The attack itself wasn't recorded, and there are other predators, such as bobcats and coyotes, that were capable of killing the koala.

The remaining 10 koalas have been removed from the outside enclosure. Zoo workers are taking extra precautions, such as locking up smaller animals in barns at night.

"Unfortunately, these types of incidents happen when we have a zoo in such close proximity to one of the largest urban parks in the country," Barbara Romero, Los Angeles deputy mayor for city services, said in a statement.

P-22 wears a tracking collar and was famously photographed near the

Hollywood sign for National Geographic. The 130-pound cat crossed two freeways to enter the 4,355-acre park several years ago.

It's a lonely life with little chance of finding a mate. Cougars typically need ranges of 75 to 200 square miles for hunting and breeding, while P-22's habitat is around 8 square miles.

The attack is just one more reason that P-22 should move, City Councilman Mitch O'Farrell said.

"Regardless of what predator killed the koala, this tragedy just emphasizes the need to contemplate relocating P-22 to a safer, more remote wild area where he has adequate space to roam without the possibility of human interaction," O'Farrell said.

Last year, P-22 wandered out of the park and lolled under a crawlspace of a home in the nearby Los Feliz neighborhood, attracting a media frenzy until he finally wandered home.

"P-22 is maturing, will continue to wander and runs the risk of a fatal freeway crossing as he searches for a mate. ... We should consider resettling him in the environment he needs," Mitchell said.

But fellow Councilman David Ryu said it would be a mistake to evict P-22. "Mountain lions are a part of the natural habitat of Griffith Park and the adjacent hillsides" Ryu said.

The zoo's director also disagreed.

"There's a lot of native wildlife in this area. This is their home," Lewis said. "So we'll learn to adapt to P-22 just like he's learned to adapt to us."

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