

Cougar makes rare successful crossing of LA-area freeway

August 8 2017



In this April 4, 2017, photo released by the National Park Service shows P-55, a young male Mountain lion that roams the western end of the Santa Monica Mountains in Calif. He was caught and outfitted with a GPS tracking device in April 2017, a few days before P-56 in the same spot. DNA analysis is underway, but they are suspected of being siblings. Biologists documented a rare case of P-55, a cougar from a mountain range hemmed in by metropolitan Los Angeles sprawl, that successfully crossing heavily traveled U.S. 101 and taking up residence in another range, the National Park Service said Monday, Aug. 7, 2017. It's only the fourth documented successful crossing of the 101 by a Santa Monica Mountains lion in 15 years of study. (National Park Service via AP)

Researchers recently documented a rare case of a cougar from the Santa Monica Mountains successfully crossing U.S. Highway 101 and moving into a range less hemmed in by Southern California sprawl, the National Park Service said Monday.

The sub-adult male dubbed P-55 crossed the 101 early on July 30 along the steep Conjeo Grade about 45 miles (72 kilometers) west of downtown Los Angeles and also crossed State Routes 23 and 118 to reach the Santa Susana Mountains, a [park service](#) statement said.

It is only the fourth known successful crossing of the 101 in the 15 years that researchers have been studying the big cats in the Santa Monica Mountains, a population dealing with inbreeding and lack of genetic diversity because the mountain range is hemmed in by Los Angeles, its western suburbs and the Pacific Ocean.

Male mountain lions need vast individual territories. But the fragmented wilderness of the Santa Monica Mountains and the massive barrier of the 101—three or more lanes in each direction—is a significant hindrance to dispersal.

The freeway and other roads are life-threatening to the region's lions—17 documented road kills since 2002.

"The overwhelming pattern we've observed through GPS tracking is lions coming up to the edge of a freeway and turning around," said Seth Riley, a wildlife ecologist at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, which sprawls over 150,000 acres of mountains and coastline.

Male mountain lions usually leave their mothers at about 1½ years of age to find their own territories. While a male can live with many females in its territory, it will face potentially fatal battles with other males if it

can't disperse.

So far in the study, it's rare for a male [mountain lion](#) in the Santa Monicas to survive past age 2, according to the [park](#) service.

P-55 had recently been fitted with a tracking collar and was seen on video in the backyard of Newbury Park home the same weekend he crossed the 101.

One proposal to help mountains lions more easily move between the Santa Monica range and the less-confined natural areas to the north would involve building a bridge for wildlife to cross the 101 at Liberty Canyon, which has open space on each side of the highway and is under permanent protection.

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