Researchers radio-collar 1st bear in mountains near LA

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This photo provided by the National Park Service shows a black bear caught in a natural area of the western Santa Monica Mountains on April 23, 2023, south of the 101 Freeway in the Los Angeles area. For the first time, researchers have captured and radio-collared a bear in the Santa Monica Mountains near Los Angeles where mountain lions have been studied for decades. The National Park Service says Wednesday, May 3, 2023, that the 210-pound black bear dubbed BB-12 was caught in a natural area on the western end of the range. Credit: National Park Service via AP, File

For the first time, researchers have captured and radio-collared a bear in the Santa Monica Mountains near Los Angeles where mountain lions have been studied for two decades, the National Park Service said Wednesday.

The 210-pound (95-kilogram) black bear dubbed BB-12 was caught April 23 in a natural area south of U.S. Route 101 on the western end of the range, the park service said in a statement.

It's the first time in 20 years that scientists have encountered a bear that has taken up residence in the mountains northwest of downtown LA, according to Jeff Sikich, a park service biologist who studies cougars.

"He appears to be the only bear here in the Santa Monica Mountains, and he's likely been here for almost two years based on our remote camera data," Sikich said. "It will be interesting to see how he shares the landscape with our other resident large carnivores."

BB-12, a male estimated to be about 3 or 4 years old, was measured, given a physical exam and outfitted with a GPS radio collar around its neck.

Researchers believe BB-12 may be the same black bear that was spotted in July 2021 lumbering along a road farther west in the Newbury Park area and later caught on wildlife cameras.

The nearest population of breeding black bears is about 25 miles (40 kilometers) north in the Santa Susana Mountains, officials said.

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This photo provided by the National Park Service shows the paw of a black bear caught in a natural area of the western Santa Monica Mountains on April 23, 2023, south of the 101 Freeway in the Los Angeles area. For the first time, researchers have captured and radio-collared a bear in the Santa Monica Mountains near Los Angeles where mountain lions have been studied for decades. The National Park Service says Wednesday, May 3, 2023, that the 210-pound black bear dubbed BB-12 was caught in a natural area on the western end of the range. Credit: National Park Service via AP, File

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