

Beloved mountain lion dies crossing same California highway where her one of her cubs was killed

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Wildlife and nature enthusiasts are grieving a famous mountain lion after it was hit by a car and killed while crossing a highway in Southern

California.

The mountain lion, lovingly nicknamed Uno because of an old eye injury that left one of her eyes cloudy, was crossing Santiago Canyon Road in Orange County—a highway the cat had safely crossed countless times before—when she was hit, the California Mountain Lion Project at the University of California, Davis said Jan. 19 on Instagram.

Wildlife enthusiasts tried to save Uno's life, but the mountain lion died from "massive head and chest injuries" before they could even start significant treatment, the group said.

"She succumbed to the most common cause of death for local mountain lions in our area—being killed while crossing roads and highways, something that any local mountain lion has to do many times in a lifetime due to their large territories and the number of busy streets and roads in our area," the group said in the post.

Uno was a collared mountain lion in the group's ongoing research about populations of the big cats in quickly developing wilderness areas of Southern California. She was first captured as a young adult at just over two years old in January 2021. The team referred to her as F312 and learned a lot from her about mountain lion behavior in the years she was studied.

Several people in the comments pleaded for more [wildlife](#) bridges in the area in response to the beloved cat's death.

"She became famous locally because of how often she got photographed on trail and [remote cameras](#) put out by [local residents](#), OC Parks, or our team," the group said. "Since it was clear who she was in the photos she was easily identified as a specific known individual—an unusual thing with [mountain lions](#) due to their similar looks from one to the other."

Wildlife photographer Mark Girardeau of Orange County Outdoors closely followed Uno's life in the Orange County wilderness. He said he was the first person to capture Uno on camera in November 2020.

"By the second or third time I got her on camera, I started to realize she had some eye injury, so I just started calling her Uno," Girardeau told McClatchy News over the phone. "After that, the name stuck and other people started following her story because she's so unique."

Girardeau believes Uno was probably the most famous mountain lion in California after P-22, the celebrity cat who shot to worldwide fame after he was photographed prowling through the night with the Hollywood sign behind him in the distance. P-22 was put down last year after he was hit by a car and state Department of Fish and Wildlife veterinarians discovered his health was failing, McClatchy News previously reported.

Girardeau reminisced about the three [close encounters](#) he'd had with Uno, two of which he captured on video.

The last time Girardeau ran into Uno, in the summer of 2023, was one of the most special. He was out checking his trail cameras when he stumbled upon her, and she strolled right past him.

The cat's "laissez-faire demeanor" around people was a major reason people loved her so much, the California Mountain Lion Project said. When she showed up among hikers, she usually paid little attention to them.

"On one occasion she walked right past the admission booth at one of the local wilderness parks without even a side glance (she didn't have to pay)," the group said.

Uno captivated locals even more when she brought four cubs into the

world, the group said. But unfortunately, none of the kittens survived.

Two of the cubs were also killed by cars—one on Glenn Ranch Road and the other on Santiago Canyon Road not far from where Uno was hit, the group said. Another cub succumbed to disease, and the last one disappeared.

Girardeau was confident Uno was pregnant when she died. He rushed to the area where she was hit and stayed with her during her last moments as local veterinarians, animal control officers and staff with the California Mountain Lion Project tried to save her life.

"Goodbye to the most beautiful [mountain lion](#)," he wrote on Instagram the night after she died. "She managed to dodge cars for so long until last night. Another [mountain lion](#) taken out of the ever decreasing population thanks to humans. RIP Uno and her unborn kittens."

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