

Cougar leaps into backyard near future site of Annenberg Wildlife Crossing

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

While Peggy McClintick and wife Sally Tuchman slept, an unexpected visitor prowled in their Agoura Hills yard.

McClintick checked her phone around 3:30 a.m. to find a notification that a person was detected by a [security camera](#) at her Agoura Hills home.

The alert didn't arouse much suspicion. The camera had been triggered at 11:30 the night before; it could have been caused by someone in a nearby driveway.

She decided to check the footage anyway—and "completely freaked out."

Their Ring camera had captured video of a mountain [lion](#) leaping easily from a small yard covered with [artificial turf](#) onto a cement wall.

The big cat perches there for a moment, appearing to take in the neighborhood, before gracefully walking along the wall.

It jumps off and is swallowed by the night.

When McClintick saw the video, she woke up Tuchman, and they stayed awake the rest of the night going over the implications of what they had seen.

It's not unusual for one of them to walk their roughly 20-pound goldendoodle, Ollie, in that exact spot at that exact time. It's dark as they round the corner until a motion sensor light switches on.

"We feel like we have to now completely change our habits, like we cannot take him out after dark on that side yard anymore," Tuchman said this week. "Because it's very closed in."

For days, walking Ollie there in daylight, "I just would stand there, just look at that spot that she was on and just absolutely panic," she said,

"because it is so close to our everyday lives."

The couple refer to the cougar as "she" based on the video, which they believe shows a female mountain lion.

McClintick and Tuchman's home is less than a mile from an expansive urban wildlife crossing being built over the 101 Freeway in an effort to provide safe passage for cougars and other critters.

The Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing is intended to provide a genetic lifeline for isolated lions in the Santa Monica Mountains, which have shown defects from inbreeding and could face extinction without intervention.

Jeremy Wolf, an Agoura Hills City Council member, said the recent video of the mountain lion instilled in him a sense of hope that the crossing would have a positive impact.

"The main star showed up," said Wolf, who has long been involved with the project. "They're around there."

In about a year and a half, when the corridor is expected to be completed, "it will have a crossing to be able to get back and forth," he added. "For it to be that close that soon, it filled me with hope and inspiration to really continue championing the project."

Last week, the final girder was installed on the crossing, completing the foundation and marking a construction milestone.

Wolf alerted the National Park Service and the National Wildlife Federation about the sighting. McClintick and Tuchman reported it to the Cougar Conservancy.

The lion does not appear to be wearing a collar or tag, indicating it's not being tracked or studied by scientists.

McClintick was Wolf's music teacher growing up, and she sent him the mountain lion video—knowing his enthusiasm for the subject.

McClintick said she and Tuchman see the crossing as a good thing, even as they recover from the shock of having a big cat so close to their living quarters.

"We just feel we have to coexist, right?" she said.

She didn't think a wild animal would jump into their yard, however, which didn't seem that easy to access, even for those with four muscular legs. It's steep on the other side of the wall depicted in the video.

"I was proven wrong," she said. "I guess wild animals do jump into your backyard."

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