

FONTANA

MOUNTAIN LION KILLED AS IT CHARGES POLICE

The cat, which may have been sick, is believed to have killed a couple of animals

By Stephen Ramirez

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A mountain lion made a rare and frightening excursion this week into a Fontana neighborhood miles from the foothills, and it was shot and killed Tuesday morning as it lunged at officers trying to capture the wildcat.

Fontana's Animal Services Team had been searching for a mountain lion for two days after receiving reports that one had killed animals at two residences in the area, Fontana police said in a news release. Animal Services is part of the Police Department.

"It is very rare. My 10 years with Fontana, I can't think of one time a mountain lion was sighted this far down into the neighborhoods," said Jamie Simmons, an Animal Services supervisor. "This is a heavily populated neighborhood with a lot of children, a lot of foot traffic."

The mountain lion was spotted about 9 a.m. Monday in a backyard on Frontenac Court in the Village of Heritage community, east of Victoria Gardens and north of the Auto Club Speedway. Several parks and schools are nearby. The street is about 4 miles south of the San Gabriel Mountains foothills.

"My wife looked out the window by the sink and there was something in the bush," resident William Martin said. "We thought it was a dog, but looking at the tail, it didn't look like a dog, so we called the police."

Police officers and the An-



COURTESY OF FONTANA POLICE DEPARTMENT

A Fontana Animal Services Team truck is parked on a street near where a mountain lion had to be killed as it charged at police officers Tuesday morning.

imal Services Team found the female mountain lion in the rear of a residence.

"It appeared agitated," Simmons said. "It also appeared lethargic, but she still had fight left in her. She jumped a 6-foot brick wall and we located her across the street."

"Rather than risk losing her in the neighborhood again, we formulated a plan," Simmons said. "We'd either tranquilizer her or we may have to take other measures. It was at that moment she lunged at our officers and was fatally shot."

Simmons felt the animal may have reacted that way because she was sick.

"Usually we have humane ways of capturing animals," Simmons said. "I believe because of her possible sickness — she appeared to be underweight — she became threatened, therefore threatening us."

The preferred scenario is to call the California Department of Fish and Wildlife if there is enough advance notice, said Fish and Wildlife spokesman Andrew Hughan. About three officers are as-

signed to San Bernardino County.

A response may be feasible if a mountain lion is up a tree, for example. But from the description of the Fontana situation, where a mountain lion is acting aggressive and near residences and schools, "That's a whole different situation," he said. It sounded like this mountain lion was "habituated" and "it has lost its fear of people."

Such a situation is more fluid, and like a SWAT team incident, "decisions have to be made in seconds or minutes rather than hours," Hughan said.

Fontana police Sgt. Kevin Goltara said if people spot a wild animal in a residential area, safety is the first priority.

"If there is a sighting, the best thing is to keep your pets inside," Goltara said. "For personal safety, just stay away from the animal rather than try to make contact with it."

"In most cases, wild animals are scared of humans," he added. "But in this case, this animal wasn't scared of humans and actually ad-

vanced on people."

Said Martin: "We're going to be checking our backyard from now on before we let the dog out."

According to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, more than half of the state is mountain lion habitat. While their nature is to avoid humans, they will sometimes eat pets and livestock and have occasionally attacked people. Here is the agency's advice to avoid conflict.

- Don't feed deer — mountain lions' preferred food — or use landscaping that deer like to eat.

- Don't leave small children or pets outside unattended, especially at dawn, dusk and night when mountain lions are most active.

- Trim brush and install motion-sensitive lighting around your house.

- Don't jog, hike or bike alone, and avoid doing so at dawn, dusk and night.

- If you encounter a mountain lion, don't approach it, but don't run. Face the animal, make noise, try to look bigger by waving your arms, throwing rocks or other objects, and fighting back if attacked.

Staff writer Gail Wesson contributed to this report.

SETTING IT STRAIGHT

The story "Assistant football coach accused of molesting a child" on page 8 on Oct. 14 contained information that needs clarifying. The suspect's mother, who spoke in an interview the day he was arrested, later said that she had meant to say she believed the accuser probably tried to touch her son sexually but she wasn't sure if that had happened.