

COUGAR KITTENS

Reported Near Antler, Saskatchewan

BY TOM WHITE*

Reports of Cougars have continued to come in from various parts of the province at different times of year. Sight reports, specimens obtained in 1939 and 1948, and plaster casts of tracks make it clear that the Cougar is a rare inhabitant of this region.¹ It is still unknown how many Cougars occur here or how far individuals range, but systematic collection of data is making the situation more clear. Detailed sightings make it possible to judge the reliability of reports. Certain actions are typical of Cougars and in many cases even untrained observers describe characteristics of gait, appearance or feeding habits that almost certainly identify this interesting animal.

Sightings made in 1970 and 1972 southeast of Moose Mountain, Saskatchewan, near the town of Antler are particularly interesting because they indicate that Cougars have bred in this area. Antler lies close to the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border approximately 40 miles north of North Dakota.

Mrs. Harris of Antler was brought up in Nova Scotia. Her only previous contact with a Cougar was one she photographed in a Nova Scotia museum. However, one morning when returning with a basket of eggs from their barn on the outskirts of Antler she found a Cougar crouched at the side of the barn about 10 feet away. Her dogs got very excited and rushed at the Cougar which "ran like the devil" with the zigzag gait of a cat. She described it as being 6 feet long from its nose to the end of its long tail, with a yellowish-tan, loose looking skin. Mrs. Harris reports that she nearly broke the eggs in her basket in her excitement, and later her report of the encounter was generally ridiculed by her

neighbors and relatives. Nevertheless she wrote down the date of her experience in her record book—March 28, 1970.

Mr. and Mrs. Harris say that other people have since seen the Cougar and have heard its voice occasionally. It sounds like a child crying hard or like a woman screaming, all unpleasant blood-curdling sounds. The cries go on for 5 minutes and then occasionally afterwards.

Mr. Harris encountered a Cougar at 10:00 a.m. on June 13, 1972. He had been out after cattle and saw it 300 yards away walking along the edge of a slough. It was close to 8 feet from nose to tail and sandy coloured. Mr. Harris believes that Cougars will not cross summer fallow. He noticed at this time that a deer had a day old fawn in the centre of a slough which was surrounded by new summer fallow. This is unusual a doe normally keeping its fawn in bushes. Also, some herds of cows were lying in a circle facing out with their calves in the centre. Usually the calves run free with an old cow and the other cows are independent. (This situation was also seen later in one herd when I was touring the area.) There were also local reports of cattle stampeding through wire fences and horses behaving wildly. (Cows forming a circle with calves in the centre while a Cougar stalked nearby was noted also at Rocanville and Wood Mountain. Stampeding of horses and cattle through wire fence has also been reported in connection with other Cougar sightings.)

A neighbour of the Harris's, George McLean, reported the following. He was summer fallowing at 9:00 a.m. four miles southeast of Antler on June 19, 1972. He observed an animal loping through long grass with only its back showing. It did not appear to be a deer.

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or Coyote, and had an unusual gait. When it came to the edge of the summer fallow 150 yards away it stopped and looked back, showing a big, round, fat face. It then leaped about 20 feet over the summer fallow into the weeds and leaped off into the brush. It was yellow-tan in colour, longer and slinkier than a deer and when it leaped its long tail could be seen. It was about 6 feet or more long, 200-250 pounds in weight and 2 feet high to its shoulder.

The next morning, Mr. McLean was cultivating the summer fallow when he again clearly observed a Cougar. This one was shorter and chunkier than the other, had a lower belly and was about 4 feet, 6 inches long, including its long tail. It kept circling through some tall grass and on one occasion stood on a knoll and appeared to be watching something. In the afternoon at the same place Mr. McLean saw first one Cougar kitten and then a second about a 100 yards away. He drove his discer at them several times trying to kill them. He got very close but was afraid to get off the tractor because he didn't know what the female Cougar would do. He was within a few yards of the kittens on several occasions and had an uninterrupted view of them. The kittens were larger than a house cat, had long tails and seemed greyish in colour. They went into a slough and then into the bush. In

the field there was an unused Badger hole in the entrance of which were found bones and feathers. The hole appeared to have been enlarged and grass had grown into the entrance forming a bed 4 or 5 feet long. Mr. McLean stated that this area normally has a high density of deer but that recently they had largely deserted the place.

Nearby, on the George Godomier farm, a cow died of natural causes and was left on the side of a field. When it was examined later, it was found to have had the hide peeled off and the entire meat had been eaten in much shorter time than is usually the case. (This is typical Cougar family feeding sign.) Mrs. Godomier said that in 1971 she was awakened one night by blood-curdling screams and thought her dog had been killed. George Godomier recalled than an old trapper who lived all his life in this area and who died some 15 years ago, had said that there were Cougars living in the area.

The above reports, which in my opinion are reliable, provide additional evidence of the existence of this rare animal in the province. Others who may be so fortunate as to sight this species are urged to record and report their observations in detail.

¹White, Thomas. 1967, History of the Cougars in Saskatchewan. *Blue Jay* 25:84-89.

RED FOXES

Make a Comeback in Central Alberta After 30 Years

BY DICK DEKKER*

J. Dewey Soper gives the distribution of the Red Fox as covering all of Alberta except the south-central and southeastern region, which was formerly the habitat of the Kit Fox.² Since 1959 I have made enquiries about the local occurrence of Red Foxes in the southern half of the province from numerous naturalists, park wardens, forest

rangers, farmers, ranchers, trappers and outfitters. It appears that during the past 40 years some significant changes have taken place. From the thirties to the late sixties, foxes were virtually absent from all of central Alberta. Recently, they are staging a comeback.

The following are my conclusions about the regional status of the Red Fox during the previous decade. It was:

1. Scarce in Jasper and Banff National Parks. (Soper reported it scarce in the mountains.)

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