
PHOTO NOTES

COUGAR TRACKS IN ALBERTA



Cougar Tracks.

Saikat Kumar Basu

The Cougar is an elusive North American large cat that has a wide range stretching from the Yukon to the Andes. In western Canada, Cougars have been located in interior British Columbia, southwestern Alberta, and southern Saskatchewan. The Cougar tracks shown in this photo were detected and photographed by Eric Van Gaalen and Saikat Kumar Basu at the Lakeview Ridge, Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta, at ca. 3000 m elevation around 09:00 h on 10 October 2009 after a thick snowfall the night before. Cougar tracks do not typically show the presence of claws, the front feet are longer compared to the rear ones, and the front toes are usually spread a bit wider. Often, tail tracks of these cats can be seen following the footprints. It was difficult to ascertain whether this track is the front or rear foot

print, since most other prints were lost in the early morning snowfall and appeared to be 1 or 2 days old based on the leaf debris collecting on the surface of the imprints. This Cougar track was located close to the park boundary; tracing it, we discovered that the animal had forced its way through the barbed wire of the park fence, scratching through the snow on the lowest wire that caught some of its body hairs. This suggests that Cougars probably frequently cross the park boundaries into the adjoining areas in search of food. Several other not so well preserved Cougar prints were located close to the barbed wire fence, and it was difficult to determine whether there was more than one individual or if they were male or female. Mostly three sub-species have been reported from western Canada. The sub-species *Puma concolor*

(syn. *Felis concolor*) *missoulensis* across southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and interior British Columbia; *P. c. oregonensis* along coastal British Columbia; and *P. c. vancouverensis* on Vancouver Island only.^{2,4,7} Latest reports indicate population sizes of around 4,500 cougars in Canada, with the highest concentration in British Columbia, over 600 in Alberta, and around 300 in Saskatchewan.^{1,3,5,6}

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- *Saikat Kumar Basu*, Department of Biological Sciences, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge, AB, T1K 3M4; E-mail: <saikat.basu@uleth.ca>

UNUSUAL LARK SPARROW NESTING SITE



Lark Sparrow nest in an upturned tree stump. The nest can be seen in the top central portion of the stump.

Sig and Ruby Jordheim

Sig and Ruby Jordheim have farmed for many years in White Bear, Saskatchewan, near the South Saskatchewan River, where Sig has spent a lifetime closely observing wildlife. When the river was dammed in the 1960's, the groves of giant poplars lining the banks were bulldozed

and buried. In later years, many remnants of this interned riparian forest returned as driftwood, collecting on the eroded river banks. From among this driftwood, Sig and Ruby salvaged a large stump, planting it upside down as an abstract lawn ornament, or perhaps as a subtle commentary on man and nature. In any case, in the summer of 2009, a Lark Sparrow, undeterred by the peculiar location and position of the stump, made use of a hollow

among the upturned roots for an unusual nesting site. Sig Jordheim writes: "Before starting school in 1928, I had a deep interest in birds and when my two older brothers went to school I searched for prairie bird nests. I was quite familiar with the Horned Lark, Vesper Sparrow,