

TOEFL iBT Sample
Reading
Cougars

(1)

Originating in the highland areas of Brazil about 300,000 years ago, the cougar--otherwise known as the puma or mountain lion --is one of the largest cats in the Americas, second only to the jaguar. Despite popular belief, the animal is not a “big cat.” This is because it is smaller than the biggest members of the cat family, such as lions or tigers. Likewise, unlike those big cats, the cougar cannot emit an ear-piercing roar. Nevertheless, the cougar is an excellent hunter that can bring down prey--such as moose--that are several times its size.

(2)

Cougars live in nearly every type of climate in the Americas, except the arctic. Indeed, of all the large predators in the Western Hemisphere, it has the widest range. This is evident in that cougar populations exist in places as far apart as Patagonia, the Sonoran Desert and the Yukon. With its easy adaptability to various weather and terrain, prey abundance is the primary factor in whether a specific region can support cougars. Secondary factors include thick vegetation or rock cover, both for hunting and, for females, to hide kittens.

(3)

Cougar habitats dwindled substantially with the coming of European settlers to the Americas and their expansion from coastal to inland areas. Since the cougars preyed on settler livestock, the animals were considered pests--so much so that American states and Canadian provinces began putting bounties on the cats. Hunters and others capitalized on these by **exterminating the animals at will**. Aggravating this mass killing were myths circulating about the cougars being dangerous to humans. These myths persisted despite the fact that the cats are human-avoidant and so rarely attack people. **Cougars learn to hunt from within a learned set of prey, one in which humans are not included.**

(4)

[] It was only in the 1960s that attitudes toward the cougar began to change, and **unregulated destruction** of the animals was ended.

[] This included **rescinding the bounties** in the United States and Canada that had led to the virtual eradication of the cats in the eastern parts of North America. **[X]**Eventually, cougar populations recovered to a level that allowed limited and licensed sport hunting of the cat. []

(5)

Even so, the surviving cougar populations were fragmented. This had a negative impact on gene diversity within these

populations and cat health conditions. This is particularly acute for very small cougar populations. **The Florida Panther**, a type of cougar, is a case in point. By the first decade of the 21st century, the cat had dwindled to a population of about 160. Although strongly protected by law, the **lack of genetic diversity in such a small population resulted in higher rates of infection, heart defects, kinked tails and dramatically lower sperm count.** These are more serious enemies to the survival of this cat population than human encroachment.

(6)

The population fragmentation also degraded the critical role that males play between populations. Female cougars are philopatric: they normally remain in or near the territory of their birth. Moreover, studies have shown that female cougars are extremely reluctant to cross highways. **In contrast to philopatric females, male cougars are natural gene dispersers that will traverse all sorts of artificial structures or habitats, such as roads or farmlands.** This is owing to the fact that males must leave the territories of their mothers to secure one of their own. Alongside this, and for breeding purposes, **an adult male cougar territory will overlap those of several females.** **Males are more likely to travel long distances between cougar populations to find these ideal territories and, in the process, enhance the opportunities for gene diversity.**

(7)

With this in mind, conservationists have stressed the need to develop safe, natural terrain pathways for cougar males. The pathways would enable them to move more easily and safely from one population to another. This may or may not mean the setting aside of certain land corridors for cougars. As a side benefit, on such lands, other forms of wildlife could flourish. At minimum, and easiest to implement, would be simply allowing the cats to move through rural or semi-rural human habitats unmolested.

(8)

Yet, the conservationists' goal of more natural pathways will continue to conflict with North American livestock owners. Many of them are convinced that cougars passing through their lands will result in high numbers of lost livestock. This fear may in fact be ungrounded, since far more livestock are lost to disease or weather than to cougar attacks. Even so, any creation of land corridors for cougars would have to entail educating stakeholders such these livestock owners—and the general public—on the activities and environmental needs of cougars.

1. Why does the author mention “ear-piercing roar” in paragraph 1?

- (A) To explain how the cougar is similar to a lion
- (B) To illustrate a prominent feature of a species
- (C) To provide an overview of big cat activities
- (D) To show how sounds can act as a warnings

2. The phrase “several times” in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) multiple occasions
- (B) numerous locations
- (C) frequency of an event
- (D) degrees of difference

3. The word “evident” in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) clear
- (B) realistic
- (C) judgmental
- (D) insistent

4. Which of the following sentences best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in paragraph 2? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

- (A) Prey abundance is critical for cougars.
- (B) Some environmental factors outweigh others.
- (C) Virtually all climates are habitable in some way.

(D) Flexibility is the key to survival for all animals.

5. The phrase “at will” in the passage refers to

- (A) putting
- (B) exterminating
- (C) aggravating
- (D) circulating

6. The word “rescinding” in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) withdrawing
- (B) resolving
- (C) impacting
- (D) assessing

7. According to the passage, why is the belief that cougars are dangerous to humans not correct?

- (A) They lack the size and strength to harm humans.
- (B) They only prey upon specific types of creatures.
- (C) They learn that armed humans can hurt them.
- (D) They rarely persist if a first attack fails.

8. According to the passage, which of the following is most likely to occur among Florida Panthers?

- (A) Genetic dispersal

- (B) Physical abnormalities
- (C) Kinked ears
- (D) Human encroachment

9. Which of the following statements is supported by the nature of female cougars mentioned in paragraph 6?

- (A) Having kittens causes females to seek ideal terrain.
- (B) Males and females stay together when traveling.
- (C) Male cougars remain near their territories of birth.
- (D) Females will usually not range as far as males do.

10. Where does paragraph 6 indicate that male cougars can be found in relationship to female cougars?

- (A) Inside their mothers' territories
- (B) Within overlapping farmlands
- (C) In intersecting pieces of land
- (D) By remote natural structures

11. What does the author conclude about natural pathways between fragmented cougar populations?

- (A) They are getting bigger due to land set-asides.
- (B) They are useless without more gene diversity.

- (C) They are becoming easier for animals to use.
- (D) They are a long-term survival necessity.

12. Conservationists have suggested all of the following as regards land management EXCEPT

- (A) Showing how many types of wildlife would gain advantages
- (B) Explaining how changed policies would lower costs
- (C) Allowing cougars to move through places unharmed
- (D) Protecting some lands from human usage

13. The word “ungrounded” in the passage is closest in meaning to

- (A) inevitable
- (B) intractable
- (C) unverified
- (D) unobserved

14. Look at the four squares [] that indicate where the following sentence can be added to the passage

Without these incentives and, coupled with other conservation efforts, American cougar populations rose to a level that allowed limited and licensed sport hunting the cat.

Where would the sentence best fit?

Select Sources

Cougar: Ecology and Conservation, Maurice Hornocker and Sharon Negri

Forest Cats of North America, Jerry Kobalenko

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