

Determining the Sex of Treed Cougars

Cougar populations are sensitive to the over harvest of female cats. Hunters can help to ensure long term harvest opportunities by selecting male cougars. The gender of a treed cougar can be identified by looking for evidence of the sex organs.

Male adult and subadult cats have a conspicuous **black spot** of hair, about 1 inch (2.5 cm) in diameter surrounding the opening to the penis sheath behind the hind legs and about **4 inches (10 cm) below the anus**. The anus is usually hidden by the base of the tail. In between the anus and black spot is the **scrotum**, which is covered with light to dark brown hair and will usually appear as another dark spot. **Look for the black spot and the scrotum to identify MALES**, this will not be present in females.

Female adult and subadult cats do not have this conspicuous black spot of hair. **The area is entirely covered in white hair**. The anus is directly below the base of the tail and the vulva is directly underneath the anus. Both the anus and the vulva will usually be hidden by the base of the tail. Teats of females are usually inconspicuous, even of mothers that have just finished nursing kittens. The apparent absence of teats is not a good indicator that the treed cougar is male.

Sometimes sex determination of cougars can be done with the naked eye. But **use a pair of binoculars** to make sexing cougars easier. If a cougar's position in a tree obscures your view, you can get the cougar to move around for a better look. Pick

up a baseball-bat-size branch and bang on the trunk of the tree. If there is snow on the ground, throw a few snow balls at the cougar. You can even climb the tree toward the cougar. These actions usually get the cougar to move. When it does, be ready to sex the cougar.

Also, sometimes the cougar urinates when bayed by dogs or when a person climbs the tree toward it. Look for the origin of the urine stream. If the urine stream comes from behind the hind legs about 4 to 5 inches below the anus, then the cougar is probably a male. If the urine stream comes from under the base of the tail, then it's probably a female.

Tracks may also be indicative of sex. Adult and large subadult **male** cougars usually have **hind foot plantar (heel) pad widths that exceed 52 mm (2 1/16 inches)**. Adult and subadult **female** cougars usually have **hind foot plantar pad widths less than or equal to 52mm (2 1/16 inches)**. Carry a small ruler or wind-up metal tape in your pocket to make measurements.

We wish to thank Ken Logan of the Colorado Division of Wildlife for permission to reproduce his text and photographs.



A



B



C



D

Male Cougar (A_D)

Penis Spot, Scrotum, Anus

Penis (black) spot ~1 inch dia. is ~4-5 inches below anus



E



F

Female Cougar (E, F)

Vulva directly below anus, both usually hidden by base of tail

No "black spot" 4-5 inches below anus

(All Photos by K. Logan)