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Troup County Panther a Florida Panther

by GA DNR Aug 5, 2009

Wildlife CSI: High-Tech Genetic Testing Used to Determine Cat's Parentage

SOCIAL CIRCLE, Ga. (August 5, 2009) - Genetic testing by the National Cancer Institute, Laboratory of Genomic Diversity, has indicated that the panther shot by a hunter in Troup County last year came from the resident southern Florida panther population.

On Sunday, November 16, 2008, a sportsman observed a mature panther or cougar while he was hunting deer in the woods of Troup County. The hunter observed the cat from his stand and shot it, according to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GDNR). The hunter who shot the panther reported the incident to the Department of Natural Resources and has not been charged in the case.

The animal was taken to the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Athens, Georgia, for examination. A necropsy revealed the animal to be in excellent nutritional condition. No evidence of microchips or other common identification methods were found on the animal. Because Florida panthers had not been documented in Georgia in years, it was initially thought that this animal might have escaped or have been intentionally released from captivity. With the genetic confirmation that the animal is a Florida panther, it is possible that this animal traveled from south Florida to Georgia.

"We have had evidence (road kill) of Florida panthers as far north as the Florida panhandle," said Tim Breault, Director of Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. "Young males, in an attempt to develop their own territory, will often wander far from their home range. We think this may have been the case in this situation."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Office of Law Enforcement is investigating this incident since the Florida panther is a federally protected endangered species.

"Finding a Florida panther that far from southwest Florida is out of the ordinary, but male panthers, particularly younger ones, can travel great distances," said Paul Souza, Field Supervisor of the South Florida Ecological Services Office. "While it's unusual for panthers to be seen that far north, it is not impossible for a young male to travel so far."

The Florida panther (Puma concolor coryi) is the last subspecies of Puma (also known as mountain lion, cougar, puma, or catamount) still surviving in the eastern United States. Historically occurring throughout the southeastern United States, the estimated 100 to 120 panthers are found in south Florida, in less than five percent of their historic range.

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http://www.ledger-enquirer.com/news/breaking_news/story/798764.html

Ledger-Enquirer

DNA links cougar killed in Georgia's Troup County to Florida panther population

BY TIM CHITWOOD - tchitwood@ledger-enquirer.com

The tests are in, and the cat was wild. DNA tests show the cougar a Newnan man shot in Troup County last November was a Florida panther, and apparently not, as authorities initially suspected, an animal that had been held captive.

“Because Florida panthers had not been documented in Georgia in years, it was initially thought that this animal might have escaped or have been intentionally released from captivity,” reads a press release the Georgia Department of Natural Resources sent out this afternoon. “With the genetic confirmation that the animal is a Florida panther, it is possible that this animal traveled from south Florida to Georgia.”

A Newnan man hunting from a tree stand shot the animal Nov. 16, 2008, on U.S. Corps of Engineers land near Abbottsford, west of LaGrange on the Alabama border. He reported it to state authorities. An examination revealed the panther to be “in excellent nutritional condition,” the state says. The 140-pound male cat was 88 inches long from its nose to the tip of its tail. It was examined at the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Athens. No microchips, tags, tattoos or other means of marking a captive animal turned up. But the cat was reported to be well-fed and fat, with a low parasite level, as though it had not been feeding on wild game. Also authorities said the cat’s pads were scuffed like it had been caged on concrete.

The DNA results mean they now have to ponder the possibility that a Florida panther can roamm far beyond its typical range on the southwest end of the Florida peninsula. Georgia’s press statement on the DNA tests quotes Tim Breault, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s director of Habitat and Species Conservation:

“We have had evidence of Florida panthers as far north as the Florida panhandle. Young males, in an attempt to develop their own territory, will often wander far from their home range. We think this may have been the case in this situation.” The evidence mentioned is cougar roadkill, says Georgia’s press statement.

Quoting Paul Souza, South Florida Ecological Services field supervisor, it says: “Finding a Florida panther that far from southwest Florida is out of the ordinary, but male panthers, particularly younger ones, can travel great distances. While it’s unusual for panthers to be seen that far north, it is not impossible for a young male to travel so far.”

The genetic testing linking the cougar to the southwest Florida panther population was conducted by the National Cancer Institute’s Laboratory of Genomic Diversity. Florida panthers belong to the last subspecies of Puma left in the eastern United States, once prowling throughout the Southeast. Now only 100 to 120 panthers remain in south Florida, their range less than 5 percent of what it once spanned.

For more, visit www.fws.gov/verobeach.