

Cougars in the Catskills

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Every so often, I read about cougars in the Catskills or other nearby locations. I do not doubt that every so often, a cougar might wander through the region.

They could be illegal pets. A cute little kitten that turns into a 200-pound adult can be too much to handle! There was a cougar killed by a car in Connecticut two years ago that was proven by DNA evidence to have come all the way from South Dakota. But there certainly is no breeding population. Yet. However, one man wants to change that.

I recently attended a lecture where predator ecologist John Laundre stated that places like the Catskills are capable of sustaining several hundred cougars!

In addition, he argued we MUST re-introduce them to restore the natural balance between predator and prey (the deer). This would lead to a healthier forest, and possibly a decline in Lyme Disease.

As you might expect, as a hiker I was a little hesitant about this proposal. I raised my hand and explained that I hike frequently in the Catskills, and I represented a local hiking club. I asked Laundre if hikers had anything to fear. He told me that cougars are extremely shy, and that I am 200 times more likely to be killed by my car by hitting a deer, than I am by a cougar. He said dogs kill far more humans than cougars. What few cougar attacks take place are usually on solitary joggers or children. Only about one death per year is blamed on cougars in the entire country.

The presentation helped to allay my fears and demystify the cougar. I am not totally convinced that cougar re-introduction is the best idea, but I am at least better educated.

You can read more about this initiative at:

<http://cougarrewilding.org/CougarNews/?s=catskills> or <http://cougarrewilding.org/CougarNews/?p=6106>.