



G41 Cougar Attack Fatality

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand how a cougar attacks, injuries caused by such an attack, a comparison of the dentitions of two different-sized cougars to the patterned injuries on the victim, and dental and oral anatomical comparative anatomy of humans and cougars.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing information on how a cougar attacks, the bitemark-patterned injuries made by cougar teeth, the dental anatomy of cougar teeth, and the postmortem anthropophagy patterns on the victim. A discussion will be included on the failure to initially capture the cougar, causing community concern that a killer cougar was on the loose, which resulted in the killing of additional wildlife, including a second cougar, a bear, and a javelina, as well as causing injury to a horse and its rider.

A cougar attacked and killed a man in a semi-rural area of southwest New Mexico in June 2008. An attempt to kill the cougar that was feeding on the remains failed and the cougar escaped until it was ensnared one week later and dispatched with a bullet. Necropsy was performed on the animal and a comparison of its dentition to the bite injuries was made along with that of a second cougar that was captured and killed. The multiple-patterned injuries to the head and neck and subsequent postmortem anthropophagy feeding patterns were examined and compared to the teeth of a large adult male and a smaller adult female cougar.

Cougars typically attack prey from the rear by surprise, leaping on the back of the prey, clamping down on the back of the neck with its cuspid teeth, and clutching around the animal's rib cage with its massive forepaws, sinking the claws into flesh to ensure there is no escape. This is when the prey falls and the cougar places its focus on the lateral and anterior aspect of the neck, suffocating the prey by crushing the trachea and/or transecting major neck vessels with its powerful bite. A cougar can also break the neck of its prey when it is on the animal's back by forcing the head back with its forepaws while continuing to clamp down on the back of the neck. As in this case, a cougar often carries or drags its kill to a secluded area to feed on the viscera, neck, shoulders or hindquarters, frequently leaving drag marks at kill sites. They frequently try to cover their kills with soil, vegetation, or snow. The viscera may be covered separately and "scrapes" or "scratches" composed of mounds of soil, grass, or leaves are often found around carcasses and trails.

Noteworthy intra-oral trauma and tooth discoloration to both cougars was evident from their ensnarement and struggle to self-extricate from the snares. The excised tongue of the cougar, including its long, keratinized filiform papillae, the deeply furrowed palatal rugae, and the teeth class characteristics will be visually compared to the human mouth and dentition.

Cougar, Attack, Animal Bite