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P-22

(cont'd from p.21)

Senator Fran Pavley, and many more, the project has been given a \$1 million grant from State Coastal Conservancy.

To be shovel-ready by 2018, an additional \$3 million is necessary to complete the needed engineering for CalTrans, and to fund the vital ongoing research of the National Park Service and other scientists, along with education, outreach and advocacy for the campaign. The hashtag, #SaveLAcougars, and a text-fundraiser campaign are just a few of the ways the project is expanding its outreach.

While there are already some tunnels in existence, one locally off the 118 Freeway (although it was not constructed for animal transit), this will be the first dedicated crossing in Los Angeles and is based on similar crossings such as the one in Banff, Canada.

"The presence of P-22 shows that it is definitely possible for wildlife to live in the city relatively untouched," says Pratt. "We have to do a better job of creating a habitat for wildlife, particularly by educating the public on how to do the right thing and not put everyone at risk when an animal ventures into our neighborhoods." She noted that recently enacted bills like SB 132, which charges local police to involve the correct authorities when a wild animal is spotted in town, will help eliminate situations like the tragic shooting by deputies of a mountain lion who got trapped in the atrium of a Santa Monica yoga studio in May 2012.

Educating the public on the etiquette of animal encounters is one of the priorities of the NPS and Kuykendall is excited to share some of the upcoming projects she is working on now. "We are rolling out the Nature Neighbors program which will educate people on how to be good neighbors to nearby animals," she says. "Also common sense tips like don't leave out pet food to attract hungry animals; trim fruit trees, make sure your trash is secured. And we will have website resources, even some smartphone apps to help!"

Recently another young mountain lion has been stealing P-22's thunder. Spotted roaming the Verdugo Mountain area, a 19-square-mile range that lies a few miles from the eastern end of the Santa Monica Mountains, the new kid on the block, named P-41, is much more outgoing than P-22. He has a penchant for posing suggestively for photos where he is often seen resting, grooming and climbing rocks in between cruising for a meal. The approximately 8-year-old, 130-pound animal is the first large carnivore to be studied in the Verdugos.

Scientists suspect that P-41 might be using the southern San Gabriel Mountains as part of his territory, a feat that would involve regular crossings of the 210 Freeway. A remote camera stationed in Sunland, in the San Gabriel

foothills, showed a big cat exploring a back deck. A slight notch on his right ear and a scar from a tick bite on his left shoulder confirmed that it was P-41.

So does this mean that we will see an increase in the number of cats in the neighborhood as more areas are developed for residential purposes? Kuykendall says no. There are not as many animals venturing into neighborhoods as people might think despite the media hoopla surrounding the recent sightings. She wants to reassure the public that the number of animals tracked has not significantly increased in recent years and most likely will remain steady.

"It may seem as if there are more animals venturing into the communities, but data shows that there are relatively few animals making their way down from the mountains into the cities," she said. Adds Pratt, "P-22 has been living for years in the midst of 6 million people and no one had even noticed."

For more stories on mountain lion sightings here and in other states, visit the National Park Service Puma Page at www.nps.gov/samo/learn/nature/pumapage.htm.

(Lisa Lyons is a veteran public relations professional who has dedicated herself to advancing the protection and well-being of animals. A practicing Buddhist, vegetarian and volunteer with animal rescue groups, she specializes in providing compelling content for non-profits and selected clients. Lisa previously wrote the cover story on Lu Parker and Monkey for THE PET PRESS.)

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