

Does a Mountain Lion Lurk in New Canaan? Wildlife Officials Examine Paw Prints

Author : David Gurliacci

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State wildlife experts are assessing photos of paw prints taken last week in New Canaan to determine whether they show clear evidence of a mountain lion, as reported by one town resident who claims to have seen the animal.

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Officials snapped pictures of paw prints at the scene and “our wildlife experts are assessing these photos to see if they can determine the source of them,” Dennis Schain, communications director for the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, told *NewCanaanite.com*.

At about 6:17 p.m. on March 30, a [Fox Run Road](#) resident contacted police, saying she'd seen a mountain lion slink through her neighbor's backyard, according to Animal Control Officer Allyson Halm.

(Fox Run Road is less than a mile from the New Canaan-Wilton border, about two thirds of the way toward the New York state line from the Merritt Parkway.)

Also known as 'cougars' or 'pumas,' mountain lions are reclusive creatures that feed mainly on deer, raccoons, rodents and various small mammals, [experts say](#).

Five summers ago, a [mountain lion made regional headlines](#) after it was photographed in Greenwich and later struck and killed by a motor vehicle on the parkway in Milford — a young male that DEEP officials determined through DNA evidence had traveled east all the way from South Dakota.

That's a distance of more than 1,500 miles — one of the longest journeys ever recorded of a land mammal in North America, and more than twice the distance ever recorded for a dispersing mountain lion.

According to the [Mountain Lion Foundation](#), a nonprofit conservation and education organization, the animals seek to avoid humans, though unprotected pets can make for easy prey.

"While people in the area should observe all common sense precautions associated with wildlife—don't approach wild animals, don't feed wild animals—there is not cause for undue alarm or any change in outdoor behavior as a result of what we have seen so far," Schain said.

According to Halm, the cougar was reported as making its way through an unoccupied children's swing set area in the New Canaan property's backyard. The woman who notified officials described a three-foot-tall animal with a tan, a tail the length of its body that moved with "cat-like slinking," Halm said. The woman told police she didn't have time to take a photo of the cougar itself.

"It's not the first time that we have experienced mountain lion sightings," said Halm, formerly Animal Control officer in Greenwich.

"I had multiple sightings reported in Greenwich, many of which turned out to be bobcats. I think the most important thing is that this area is just a really good natural habitat for wildlife. Many homes seem to have that half-acre of undeveloped land for that privacy, so it's natural habitat for wildlife, just corridor after corridor for these guys. So I have no reason to discredit this sighting, whatsoever."

Schain asked for anyone in the area who has additional information, or photos, that might be helpful in the state investigation, to please contact Chris Vann of the DEEP's Wildlife Division at chris.vann@ct.gov.