

Mountain lion update

By Dr. Quinton Martins

In the Sonoma Valley and beyond, the environmental nonprofits True Wild Conservation (www.truewild.org) and All Hands Ecology (formerly Audubon Canyon Ranch) are spearheading a mountain lion (Puma concolor) research and education project in collaboration with Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue and University of California Cooperative Extension's Human-Wildlife Interactions Advisor. Living with Lions is a grassroots mountain lion conservation and research project working with communities to coexist with wildlife.

The most exciting news is that one of the female mountain lions I have been tracking since November 2021, P33, gave birth to her



One of the two kittens still thriving on February 25. Mountain Lion P33 gave birth to three kittens on January 23. Photo by Dr. Quinton Martins

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third litter of kittens on January 23. P33 is the Sonoma mama mountain lion living in the Taylor Mountain/Bennett Valley region. If you recall, we were tracking P33 with her daughter P50 last year, the single surviving kitten from her second litter. It was encouraging to see that P50 survived to dispersal age, leaving mom sometime in August last year. We got a trail camera photo of P50 alive and looking well in November again and hope to catch a glimpse of her sometime soon.

Since mom and daughter separated, I had been on the lookout for signs of denning, and in early February, after a period where few GPS points were transmitted from the collar, I picked up signs that looked promising to be a den. My wife Liz and I tried to access the site on the first morning, but a VHF signal in the direction of the site meant mom was close by. I tried again in the late afternoon. Lo and behold, while P33 was out hunting, I managed to find three, sweet, little 10-day old kittens huddled together in a neat den under a large fallen tree.

Video footage monitoring the den showed no obvious signs of P33 being bothered by my smell, and she remained in the den another 2 days before moving the kittens about 100 meters away. We do not handle the kittens at all.

So far, P33 has moved the kittens four times. This is typical mountain lion behavior, moving them for safety and as their needs change as they get older. One kitten (P59) was sadly found dead a few days after P33 had moved them to the second den. It looked like the kitten was killed by a predator, but we are not 100% sure. I did not get to see the kittens at the third den, but managed a brief glimpse of two of them still alive at the fourth den on February 25.

It is incredibly challenging rearing mountain lion kittens, and we have seen a very low survival rate in the North Bay (<25%). We are hoping that P33 can manage to keep her remaining two kittens alive till dispersal age. There are many challenges they face between now and then. Once they leave mom, they continue to encounter threats from other mountain lions as well as interactions with people (through livestock depredation events and vehicle collisions) that could lead to their demise.

Other mountain lion news

Since our last update, we have collared five new male mountain lions in Sonoma County (P51, P52, P53, P54 & P55). Unfortunately, P51, a young dispersing male was killed crossing HWY12 near Oakmont, after managing to navigate his way from Sebastopol across the Valley, under Highway 101 and through the hills of Fountain Grove. P53 was another unfortunate loss in the area. He was collared in Glen Ellen in November 2025, and at the time was diagnosed with Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV). In February he died of an unknown cause. Tests are being done to see if, like the multiple mortalities we documented in 2024, he too died of FeLV. The other 3 cats seem to be doing well.

Other news is that our safari and conservation company True Wild has transitioned into two separate entities - True Wild Conservation and True Wild Safaris. True Wild Conservation was registered late in 2025 as a conservation 501(3)c nonprofit (Tax ID: [395067030](#)), while we will continue our for-profit safari company through True Wild Safaris. We have been, and will continue supporting conservation work, here and abroad, through the specialized tailor-made safaris we offer in Africa.

For further updates please visit [truewild.org](#). Dr. Quinton Martins is the Director of True Wild Conservation and Principal Investigator of the North Bay “Living with Lions” project, a collaboration with All Hands Ecology.

DR. Martins is also the managing partner of True Wild Safaris, a Sonoma County-based safari company that designs bespoke African safaris aimed at connecting people deeply with nature and creating lasting impressions.

Martins is a passionate conservationist from South Africa who has dedicated over 30 years to wildlife and conservation, both as a professional African safari guide and a scientist specializing in big cat research. He founded and was CEO of the Cape Leopard Trust, a successful predator conservation NGO based in South Africa where he completed his PhD on leopards.

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P33 eyeing the camera out while patiently suckling her three kittens. Photo by Quinton Martins, Phd., True Wild Conservation, All Hands Ecology



P33's three kittens photographed on February 2. Photo by Dr. Quinton Martins, True Wild Conservation, All Hands Ecology

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