

'Black Cat' identification

Bill Atkinson

Program Development Officer Pests, Emergencies & Strategic Response, Orange Agricultural Institute

Over the past few years there have been many reports of alleged large black cats roaming the Blue Mountains of NSW. This Primefact will help those who see or hear a strange animal – or see signs of a strange animal. It tells how to gather useful evidence that will help identify the animal.

What might the animal be?

At times, and under certain conditions, many common animals may be confused with a large black cat such as a panther or black leopard. These include breeds of large dogs, swamp wallabies and large domestic/feral cats.

The silhouettes shown in Figure 1 give the comparative shapes and sizes of these animals, including some exotic cat species.

The table below shows statistical ranges of various types of animals that may also help in the identification process.

What made that footprint?

The size and shape of footprints can help identify the animal that made the print so photographs and plaster casts of footprints left in moist soil and on concrete by muddy feet are useful. Put something beside the print to give it scale – say a 20c coin.

Animal	Scientific name	Weight range (Kg)	Head & body length (mm)	Tail length (mm)	Shoulder height (mm)
Domestic/feral cat	<i>Felis catus</i>	3-16	460-530	260-300	~350
Puma, cougar	<i>Felis concolor</i>	36-103	966-1959	660-784	600-700
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	28-90	910-1910	580-1100	450-780
Jaguar	<i>Panthera onca</i>	36-158	1120-1850	450-750	680-760
Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>	150-220	2000-3000	900-1050	1000-1200
Swamp wallaby	<i>Wallabia bicolor</i>	13-17	660-850	640-860	
German shepherd	<i>Canis familiaris</i>	28-37	* 760-900	* 700-800	550-650

* estimate

Methods of taking these casts can be found at Internet sites such as www.bear-tracker.com.

Differences between the footprints of various types of animals can be seen in Animal Tracks 1 and Animal Tracks 2 on the parkweb.vic.gov.au website and on various pages of the www.bear-tracker.com website.

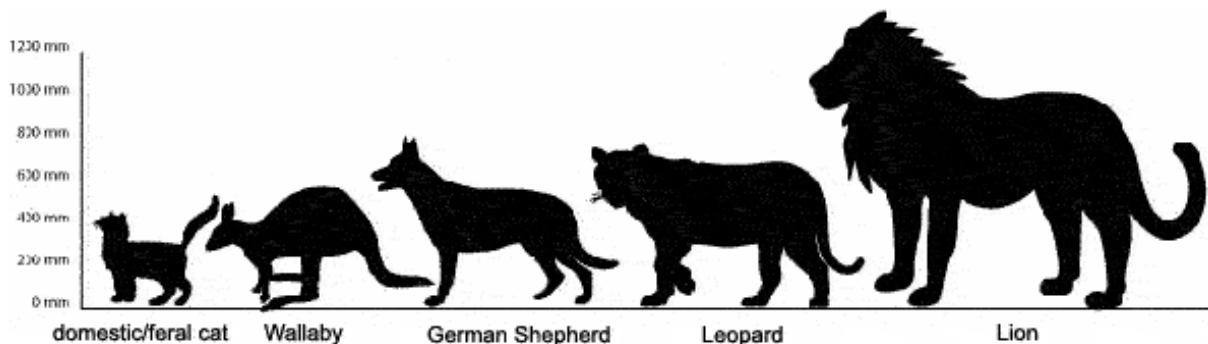


Figure 1. Shape and size comparison of various animals



Other evidence to collect

Hair and scat (faeces) samples can also be used to identify animals in an area. Seek advice from a veterinarian on how to collect these and where to send them.

What information should you collect if you see something that may be a large cat?

A clear photograph or video footage of the animal, including something of known size for comparison, would be very good evidence. Supporting information is suggested below, which would assist in identifying the animal. It must be remembered that photographs taken to date have not provided conclusive evidence.

Information about the animal should include:

- height at the shoulder
- body colour and markings
- head size and shape, ear size and shape and position on head
- length of tail
- length of body
- estimated weight
- eye colour

Any other distinguishing factors should be noted. Information about the sighting is also important, including:

- the distance you were from the animal when you saw it
- length of sighting in seconds
- time of day and the light conditions
- where was the sighting (street address, GPS waypoint or latitude and longitude)
- what sound, if any, did the animal make
- what was it doing when it was seen.

As soon as possible after you see a strange animal you should make notes of these points and anything else that you think might be important. Use the [Unidentified animal report](#) form, or contact your nearest office of NSW Department of Primary Industries. Report forms should be sent to the Vertebrate Pest Unit, Locked Bag 21, Orange NSW 2800 – Fax 02 6391 3206. If you are unable to make a written report, phone 02 6391 3266.

© State of New South Wales
through NSW Department of Primary Industries 2008

ISSN 1832-6668

Check for updates of this Primefact at:
www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/primefacts

Disclaimer: The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (April 2008). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of New South Wales Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser.

Job number 8697