

Anticoagulants and Mountain Lions

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, September 2006

We are fortunate to live next to the Santa Monica Mountains where tens of thousands of acres are protected as National and State parklands. This mountain range not only provides us with beautiful views and hundreds of miles of recreational trails, but they are also home to over one thousand different types of plants and 450 invertebrate species, from mountain lions to the smallest of creatures. The plants and habitats in the Santa Monica Mountains comprise one of the most biologically diverse areas in the nation. Yet, we are losing some of that diversity to the unintentional poisoning of wildlife by human use of one particular type of pesticide around our homes, which is then carried up the food chain to the largest mammals in our region.

Four adult mountain lions lived in Santa Monica Mountains and Simi Hills last year; two, a male and a female, were found dead with lethal quantities of anticoagulant poisons in their systems. The remaining two lions had a litter of four cubs, but we have since learned that two of the cubs and the mother were killed in fights. Necropsies showed that they, too, had anticoagulant poisons in them. There is no doubt the remaining three mountain lions that are still roaming the mountains are being slowly poisoned.

The National Park Service has found that 80% of the bobcats in our area have some level of anticoagulants in their systems and have seen a dramatic decrease in their populations. While no study has been done locally of owls, hawks and other raptors that eat small rodents, they also may have experienced large reductions in their population. There are also many cases of accidental poisonings of house pets that eat the poison set out for rodents.

Anticoagulants, such as bromadiolone and brodifacoum, prevent clotting and cause animals to bleed to death internally. The use of anticoagulant rodenticides is widespread. Not only do residents use them at home, they are also applied at golf courses, at schools, in parks, and around housing developments. The rodenticides are also becoming increasingly lethal to wildlife as rodents develop resistance and manufacturers develop super-strength anticoagulants that are longer lasting.

Fortunately there are alternatives that can eliminate rodents without the drastic effects we're currently seeing to animals further up the food chain. Pesticides that don't contain bromadiolone and brodifacoum, traps, gas, and putting up owl boxes to encourage natural predators to do the job instead of poisons, are all viable alternatives.

The loss of our wildlife is a wake up call. Individually we must stop using this kind of rodenticide at home. Government agencies must stop the use on public lands, and legislators need to rise above the lobbying efforts of the pesticide industry and restrict the use of anticoagulants, and include information on second hand poisoning on warning labels. The small change we make today can protect our wildlife for future generations.