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Florida panther snatches cat from porch

By Jeremy Cox

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A 120-pound Florida panther crept onto a front porch late Thursday night in Copeland and left with a house cat in its jaws, state wildlife officials said today.

The encounter at 25750 State Road 29 is remarkably similar to a Sept. 26 incident in which a male panther snatched a cat off its owner's front stoop a few hundred yards away in the same community. This year, there have been seven cases of panthers attacking pets or livestock in Collier County, a sharp increase that reflects the shrinking boundaries between humans and the big cats.

A woman spotted a large animal on her porch Thursday just before 10 p.m. and opened her front door to investigate. The door banged into the rear of what appeared to be a panther, the woman told investigators with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

"It turned and looked in her direction with the cat in its mouth," said Dani Moschella, an FWC spokeswoman.

Biologists aren't sure which panther is to blame for Thursday's attack. The woman said she didn't see a radio collar on the animal; the panther involved in the Sept. 26 encounter was wearing a collar whose battery apparently had died.

This morning, biologists, using radio signals, detected the presence of a collared female panther near Wagon Wheel Road, about two miles away from the attack site. The state is considering using cameras equipped with motion detectors on the property to catch a glimpse of the panther or setting out a cage to trap the animal.

Scientists believe about 70-100 panthers are left in the wild, making the panther, an icon of Florida's wild past, one of the most endangered species on the planet.

"This is a somewhat remote area, so the presence of a panther there is expected," Moschella said. "The sighting of a panther, however, is unusual."

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