

EXPERTS ADVISORY

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EXPERTS ON BOBCATS, MOUNTAIN LIONS AND OTHER WILDLIFE AVAILABLE FOR COMMENT

Pace University professors of environmental science and animal law offer insight

PLEASANTVILLE, NY, February 3, 2012 – The spotting of what was first reported as a mountain lion and then a bobcat in Pleasantville is a rare occurrence. While large animals in the New York metropolitan area are usually limited to an overabundant deer population, the suburban areas do host coyotes, foxes, and bobcats.

David N. Cassuto, JD, PhD, is expert in animal law, board member of the Animal Legal Defense Fund, and founder of the Animal Blawg (animalblawg.wordpress.com), a blog focusing on animal law, policy and ethics. Said Cassuto, “While it’s understandable that some people find it unnerving, the appearance of this cat is a victory for biodiversity. Any actions taken should account for both the opportunity and the risks that such animals embody. Those actions should also comply with the law. It bears remembering that car travel presents a far greater danger to people than this cat ever will. So, if there is indeed a mountain lion in our midst, we should celebrate nature’s resilience even as we take common sense measures to safeguard both people and the cat(s).”

Melissa Grigione, PhD, associate professor and director of the graduate program in environmental science at Pace, is an expert in wildlife and large felines. Grigione said mountain lions in Pleasantville may be more common than previously thought. “Mountain lions used to be native to this area and they’re starting to come back here. They’re going through an eastward bound movement,” said Grigione. “Now that it’s been warmer here there’s more forage, which means more deer, which is tempting to them.”

Grigione has studied mountain lions for nearly 20 years all over the world including in California and Chile. Grigione said it’s rare to see mountain lions because they are likely more afraid of humans than humans are of them. “Rarely, a female with cubs might be in a defensive or attacking state.”

With news that the sightings may in fact be a bobcat, Grigione is even less surprised. The bobcat is native to New York. According to Grigione, the bobcat is active in the evening and again before sunrise. “There is plenty of room in Westchester for the bobcat to coexist with humans safely,” she noted.

While it is best to avoid direct confrontation with any wild animal, “understanding these animals will avoid unnecessary encounters and unnecessary hysteria,” said Grigione.

Grigione and Cassuto are among several professors from Pace University and the Law School who have joined forces to protect the Pocantico River Watershed by forming the Conservancy. Fellow founder, **University Professor Nicholas A. Robinson**, an internationally-recognized environmental lawyer notes that “the Pocantico watershed is a unique and beautiful place which abounds with undeveloped areas including parks and – a rare commodity in suburbia – wilderness.”

The Conservancy has undertaken to prepare a watershed management plan which in the words of Professor Robinson, “will evaluate what we have here in the Pocantico watershed, and formulate a strategy to protect it.”

Cassuto, Grigione and Robinson are available for comment. Contact Cara Cea at 914-906-9680.