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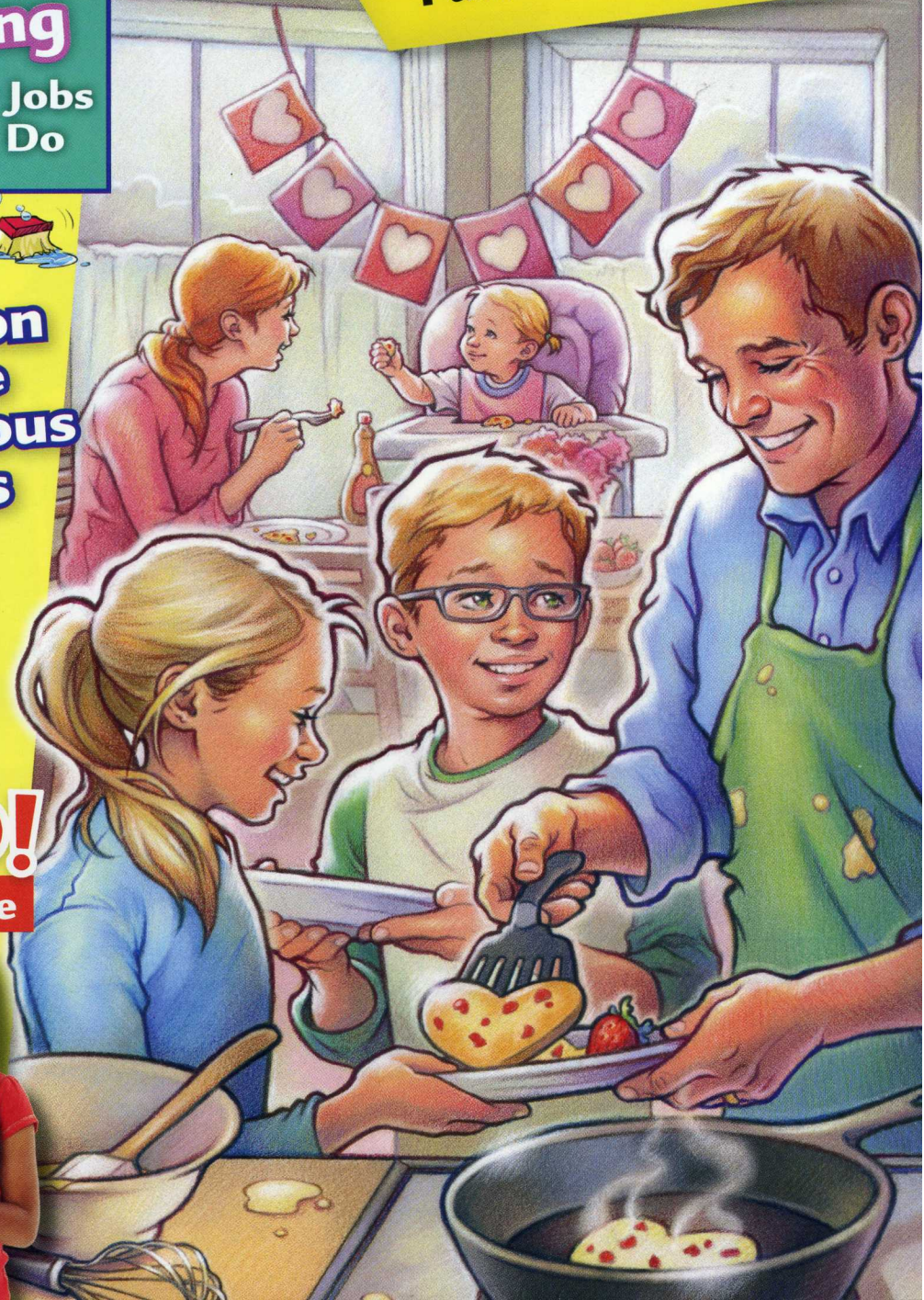
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Mountain Lion M6 Finds a Way

He was slinking between two habitats.

By Nina Kidd

As a young man, Paul Beier hiked in the mountains of California. *Man, I love these places*, he thought. *I want to make sure that all this stays around.*

He wanted to work outdoors and help protect wildlife, so he went to school to learn more. After he earned his Ph.D. degree and became "Dr. Paul Beier," he eagerly signed up for a job studying mountain lions. These large, wild cats once lived throughout the United States, and people have given them many names, such as cougar, panther, and catamount. Now mountain lions live mainly in the Rocky Mountains and westward.

Mountain lions need a lot of land to survive. They need food, mates, and places to rear their young. But many wild areas have been divided by freeways and

taken over by towns. The small wilderness areas of the Santa Ana Mountains in Southern California didn't have much room for cougars. And yet a few still lived there. How did they do it?

Habitat Patches

Many big animals (not just mountain lions) are disappearing. Those that survive are being trapped in shrinking patches of habitat. A patch may not have enough space or food for a cougar to survive. Scientists wondered if cougars could move from one patch to another. If so, maybe humans could preserve wildlife corridors to connect the patches, providing enough room for the animals.

But no one had shown that animals use wildlife corridors in real life. To see if mountain lions

had found corridors through local suburbs and freeways, Paul and his research team studied 32 lions over a five-year period. They used a drug to make each cat sleep, buckled a radio collar around its neck, and let it go.

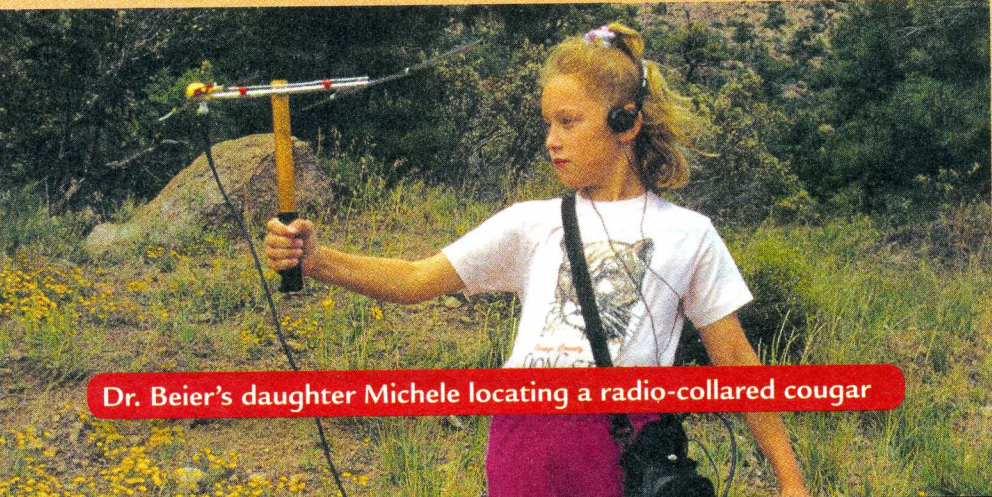
Every day, Paul used an antenna and receiver to find mountain lions, listening for radio beeps from their collars. Once or twice a week, he trailed one of the cougars all night. He traced the big cats' travels on a map. Sure enough, some of them had discovered paths from one small parkland to the next.

Mountain Lion M6

One mountain lion became famous for his travels. He was named M6: "M" for Male, and "6" because he was the sixth one collared in the study.

M6's corner of the Santa Ana Mountains wasn't large enough for him. The Chino Hills State Park was not far away, but the trip was dangerous.

After dark, M6 used a paved vehicle underpass to cross under a busy eight-lane freeway. He slipped by a riding stable, then picked his way through a golf course and across two sets of busy railroad tracks. Finally, he



Dr. Beier's daughter Michele locating a radio-collared cougar



Mountain lion M6

To His Students . . .

“Every hour of your one wild and precious life is worth more than any wage you will ever be offered. We choose forestry and conservation biology for an opportunity to make a difference in our communities, to understand how the world works, and to use what we learn to *improve* how the world works.”

—Dr. Paul Beier

arrived in the sheltered canyons of 12,000-acre Chino Hills State Park. There, the cougar found deer to hunt. During a year and a half, the scientists recorded M6 making this journey 22 times!

Then Paul learned of plans to build houses, gas stations, and a mall that would block M6’s path.

Mountain lions need a lot of land to survive.


Paul told newspapers, “The loss of this corridor would guarantee the extinction of the mountain lion from Chino Hills and endanger the entire population of lions in the Santa Ana Mountains.” A local citizens’ group called Hills for Everyone raised money to buy the land and add it to the state park. When the group visited the state capital and showed the map that Paul had made of M6’s journeys, the lawmakers saw how important the corridor was.

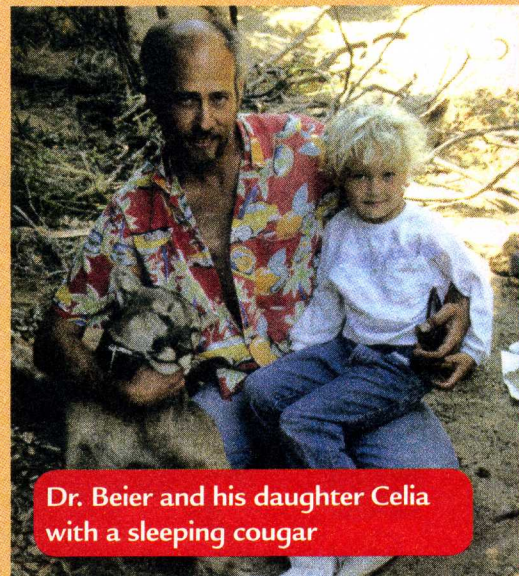
The lawmakers had the underpass preserved, with the pavement removed and with native bushes near the openings. While traffic roared above, M6 and other mountain lions could move safely back and forth between the state park and the mountains. Other animals such as deer, foxes, and bobcats could also use the corridor.

More Corridors

Paul’s research showed that wildlife corridors can save animals. Since his study in the Santa Ana Mountains, scientists and conservationists around the world have begun restoring and protecting wildlife corridors.

Today, Paul is a professor at Northern Arizona University. He is also one of the world’s experts on mountain lions and on wildlife corridors. He has helped rescue jaguars, tigers, hippopotamuses, and elephants by making sure the animals can travel safely to the land they need.

And what about M6? Paul feels confident that M6’s grandkittens and great-grandkittens have grown up and are still roaming the Santa Ana Mountains. 



Dr. Beier and his daughter Celia with a sleeping cougar

Next Month:
Tarsiers Have a Hero

