

# Wild Cat Health Project

Keeping Wild Cats & People Healthy

## Why this matters

Over 70% of new and emerging diseases in the world are zoonotic—meaning they can be shared between animals and people. As housing and development push further into California’s remaining open spaces, wild cats like pumas and bobcats are forced to live closer to our cities, neighborhoods, and pets. While these big cats are essential for healthy ecosystems—helping control prey populations and maintain biodiversity—this closer contact increases the risk of disease transmission in both directions.

Healthy wild cats mean healthier ecosystems and safer communities. Understanding and reducing these risks protects wildlife, pets, and people.



## About the project

The **Wild Cat Health Project** is a multi-year effort to understand how living near cities affects wild cat health. We collect fecal samples (“scat”) from pumas and bobcats using a specially trained scent-detection dog. Our research spans the San Francisco Bay Area and Orange County, covering a wide range of urban-to-wild landscapes.

Scat samples are sent to our partner laboratories, where they’re analyzed for:

- **Parasites** including Toxoplasma that can affect humans and wildlife
- **Stress hormones** to assess whether if urban life raises chronic stress
- **Pollutants** which can accumulate in predators at the top of the food chain
- **DNA** for genetic diversity and species ID



# What we can learn from scat

Scat is like a health report card for wild cats. It can reveal what they've been eating, what diseases or parasites they carry, and whether they are stressed. By comparing samples from areas near cities with those from more remote habitats, we can see how urban life is affecting them.

Using cutting-edge spatial modeling and analyses, we uncover patterns in wildlife behavior and disease risk. Each model iteration brings us closer to understanding the pressures these cats face and how they adapt.



# Why it's urgent

Pumas in both the Bay Area and Southern California are at risk of extinction and are candidates for protection under the California Endangered Species Act. Low genetic diversity, habitat loss, and human-wildlife conflict leave them especially vulnerable to disease outbreaks. The WCHP provides the data needed to spot health threats early, inform conservation action, and create tools for communities to safely coexist with wildlife.



# Community connection

Our outreach programs share findings with the public—raising awareness about the links between urban growth, human-wildlife conflict, and disease risk. We also create practical resources for preventing problems before they start, helping people, pets, and wild cats thrive together.

Grounded in a One Health approach, our work recognizes the interconnected health of wildlife, ecosystems, and people—tracking movement and potential disease interfaces to protect biodiversity and safeguard community well-being.

# You can help!

Our shared health depends on the health of the wild. By supporting the Wild Cat Health Project, you help protect pumas, bobcats, and the ecosystems we all rely on. Your gift fuels groundbreaking research that safeguards wildlife, biodiversity, and public health. 100% of your donation goes directly to this critical work—every dollar makes a difference.



Scan the QR Code or visit [felidaefund.org](https://felidaefund.org) to donate!



# Our partners

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University of Texas at Austin • Fresno Chaffee Zoo • Conservation Society of California