

Silver Hills Feline Thought to be Puma

by Bennette Roach

The Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Brunel Meade called a press conference this week in an obvious attempt to allay fears of residents at the existence of what has been described as a puma or mountain lion, a member of the large cat family.

"I don't think there is reason for alarm, the minister said, "we assume this animal has been roaming the hills for some time now, without causing any harm to human beings."

Mr. Meade said that the ministry is making careful plans to capture the animal,

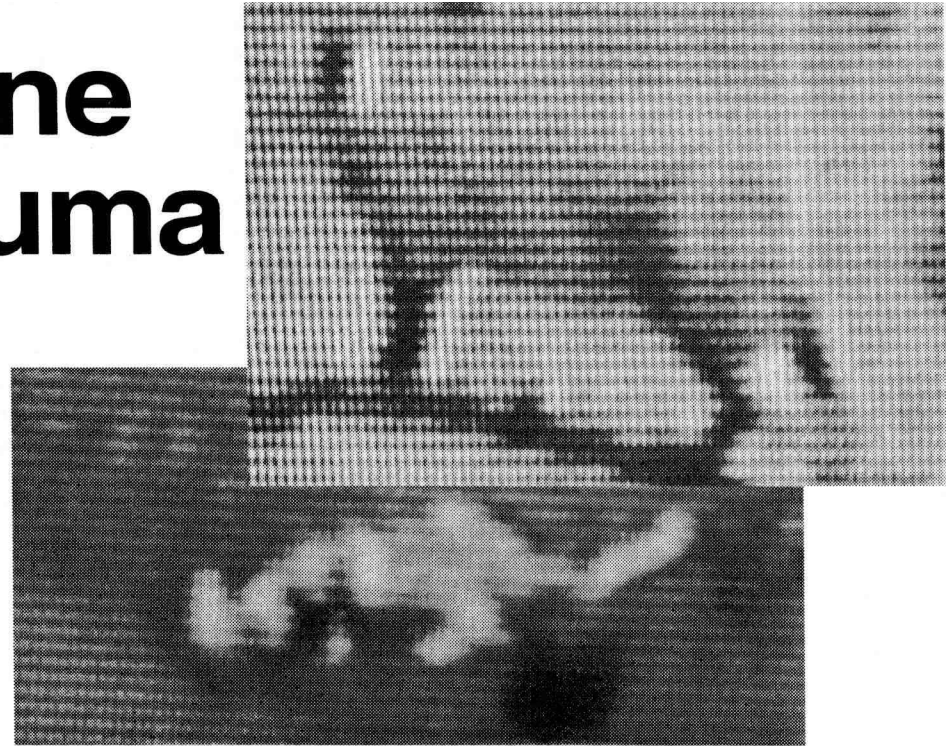
which may involve assistance from DFID's helicopter service.

Still trying to calm fears, he said further, "we are extremely sensitive to the environmental implications of handling this animal," expressing concern about the safety of "society and our people."

He spoke of the safety of the animal also, saying: "we are concerned about the safety of the team, "who will try to capture the animal, and "we want the animal safe, alive and in-tact."

Earlier this week also, Chief veterinary surgeon Dr. Wilford Daniels confirmed by

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Camera shots of the video - Above: the animal walks away from pond Below: the cat drinking at the pond

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his observations the presence of "some feline animal. He said: "What we saw were several carcasses which give some evidence they were preyed upon by some feline animal. We noticed there were parts of carcasses with broken necks."

Livestock owners in the area have said they were not sure how many livestock may have been killed by the animal, as no one was sure how long it has been roaming the area. It is also doubtful that they would have any good count on the number of livestock that they own in the area.

Meanwhile, yesterday, the Montserrat National Trust (MNT), which first revealed the news of the possibility of the existence of the catlike animal in the Silver Hills, first captured on video by Mr. Arne Hammerlund, issued a factual statement in a press release. It states:

On Saturday, April 22, 2000, a member of the Montserrat National Trust while on a hiking expedition in the Silver Hills, observed a feline or catlike species which never recorded on the island.

"The hiker was able to take a video of the animal and presented it to the National Trust."

The release further said that the hiker went back to the area with two other persons three days later, when another

video was taken of the animal.

The release stated that some conclusions have been made, "from the description of the hiker and an analysis of the video, by a Wildlife Biologist in the USA, who specializes in Mountain Lion sightings."

These conclusions confirm - "the animal sighted is approximately 26-28 inches in body length plus a tail of approximately 16 inches. The animal is approximately 16 inches high at the shoulder. This means that the feline is quite small and is about the size of a normal 'Montserrat dog.' It is not large as a full-grown goat or sheep."

The animal is quite shy and moves away from people, so there is no reason to be alarmed by its presence."

Confirming Minister Brunel Meade's earlier statements, the MNT is working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture "as well as other international agencies to identify the exact species and to develop strategies to protect the animal and to inform the public."

There have been several reports from different people of having seen this or a similar animal some time in the past, encouraging suspicions that the animal may have been brought to Montserrat very young and that it either escaped or was let loose in the hills when it had grown larger.