

<http://www.nbc4.com/news/3266397/detail.html>

# Lion Reportedly Spotted In Ohio Suburbs

POSTED: 8:20 am EDT May 4, 2004

Residents of a suburban Ohio neighborhood have been asked to stay in their homes after authorities received reports Monday night of a large, wild animal running in the area.

A lion was reportedly spotted in the Gahanna Woods neighborhood, south of Columbus. Officials say the lion could weight up to 400 pounds.

A Columbus police officer reported possibly seeing a lion at about 8 p.m. Monday. Then a truck driver also reported spotting the animal at about 9:45 p.m.

The driver, Jack Dingiss, said he pulled into a parking lot and he noticed the animal crouching under a tractor-trailer. Dingiss said the animal looked into the lights of his truck and then took off into the woods.

"I couldn't believe it," Dingiss said. "I thought I was losing my mind."

Authorities used a helicopter and an infrared camera to search the nearby woods, but couldn't find the animal. Gahanna police said they would continue the search in the morning by foot.

Authorities said they did not know how a lion would get into the area, but said a nearby dump would be attractive to a hungry animal.

[http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2004-05-04-lion-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2004-05-04-lion-usat_x.htm)

Posted 5/4/2004 11:01 PM Updated 5/4/2004 11:09 PM

## If it's a lion, Ohio hopes it's a fraidy-cat

By Dennis Cauchon, USA TODAY

In the suburbs of Columbus, Ohio's most populous city, a lion sleeps tonight. At least, some residents hope so.

The reported sighting of a lion in the woods Monday night has sent this affluent commuter town of 34,000 into a tizzy.

Police aren't sure it really was a lion. Several dozen police officers on Tuesday searched a 1-square-mile area on foot and by helicopter. All they found were deer tracks and a big dog.

"I'm the first person to disbelieve these kinds of reports," says Gahanna Police Lt. Jeff Spence. "But we do have three credible, consistent, independent sightings."



The witnesses say they saw a 300- to 400-pound cat with a low-slung tail. The animal appeared agile and walked low to the ground. It had no mane.

A Columbus police officer was the first to report seeing the lion, in daylight, at 7:30 p.m. A trucker says he saw it at 9:30 p.m. Railroad workers say they saw it about midnight.

The sightings occurred in a wooded area near Port Columbus International Airport. Ten other sightings were reported after the initial reports, but police discounted them.

Mountain lions, which can weigh about 150 pounds, were hunted to near-extinction or driven from the eastern USA more than 100 years ago. But sightings are sometimes reported in mountainous areas of Pennsylvania and West Virginia about 200 miles from Columbus. Game officials generally dismiss such reports for lack of solid evidence or consider the animals escaped pets.

People occasionally encounter mountain lions in western states, even in heavily populated areas in the foothills near Los Angeles, Denver and other cities. A mountain lion fatally mauled a man and severely injured a woman in January south of Los Angeles.

Zoos and animal breeders in the Columbus area say none of their lions is missing. Spence says animal experts told him that the lion, if there is one, is likely to travel at night and avoid people.

But some Gahanna residents were being cautious.

Chris Tidwell, 52, owner of a wallpaper shop, kept her front door closed Tuesday. "We're all amused by the lion, but why take chances?" she says.

But others love the idea of a local lion rather than fear it.

"I hope it's true," says Jordan Stull-Barnes, 19, who works at Jersey Mike's Subs. "It's the most exciting thing that's happened here in a long time."