

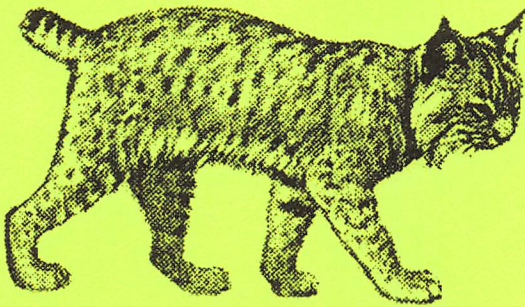


## Bobcat

*(Felis rufus)*

"What a cute kitty!" you might say. But this is no housecat! Bobcats are also known as wildcats, a very appropriate name. A cornered bobcat has been known to slash through a heavy leather work boot with one swipe!

Bobcats are found throughout the United States and into southern Canada in a variety of habitats from forests to deserts, swamps to mountains. About the size of a large housecat bobcats weigh an average of 15-20 pounds (7-9 kg), but the record is 39 pounds. The total length from head to the tip of its bob tail is up to 30 inches (75 cm).



The scientific name means "red cat". Most bobcats are a reddish or tawny color with black streaks and spots. The belly is cream with dark spots. They have a short tail with a white tip and small, tufted ears like their northern cousin the lynx.

Bobcats, like most cats, are solitary animals, and much of their hunting is done at night. Their home range depends on the abundance of food available. A male may roam over an area as much as 10 square miles, a female as little as 5 miles.

The bulk of their diet consists of rabbits and rodents. Other menu items include ground birds, snakes, lizards opossums, and grasshoppers--whatever they can catch. They have even been known to take an adult deer by stalking the animal, throwing themselves on its back, biting at the base of its skull, and tearing with its claws until the prey drops.

Trails of bobcats can be seen not only by footprints, but also by scratches on tree trunks where they have stretched and sharpened their claws like a domestic cat using a scratching post. They climb trees quite well, and they are also good swimmers. And, like domestic cats, they can purr.

Bobcats reach sexual maturity early, and females usually breed in their first year. The kits may be born during any month, but usually in March or April. Gestation takes 50-60 days, and the kits are blind for their first week. Bobcats usually have 2-3 kits in a litter, but can have up to six. The den is usually a log or thick underbrush, especially palmetto thickets in Florida. The mother fiercely defends her kits and den against predators.

Bobcats have been hunted by people for their soft fur and for sport which has greatly decreased their numbers. Human development has also destroyed a great deal of their habitat, so it is difficult to see one in the wild today. To see this shy cat in the wild is a memorable experience. If you see one, stand still and observe the bobcat quietly. They are easily frightened by noise and sudden movements.