



Bobcat *Lynx rufus*

Field Notes



Philip Bouchard, Creative Commons

Bobcat lying in grassy area. Note its pointed ears.

Bobcats are a common animal in the Klamath Region but few can say they've seen one in the wild. They likely evolved from the Eurasian lynx, which immigrated to North America from Asia via the Bering Land Bridge during the Pleistocene Epoch. The bobcat is a close relative to the larger Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*). They are of the same family as the cougar (*Puma concolor*), but not the same genus.

Bobcats are medium sized cats and the smallest member of the genus, *Lynx*. Their European cousins—the Eurasian lynx and Iberian lynx—are much larger than both the bobcat and the Canada lynx. Bobcats weigh from 4.5 kg to 18 kg (10 to 40 lbs), averaging 7 kg (15 lbs). They are named after their “bobbed” tail, which is black tipped and about 5 cm (2 in) in length with white coloring underneath. Their color ranges between pale brown, gray brown, or deep reddish brown, marked with diffused spots on their back and white or cream coloring with blackspots on their chest, belly, and the insides of their legs.

Habitat and Distribution

Bobcats range from Southern Canada through much of the continental U.S and into Central Mexico. They are habitat generalists—living in dens amongst a range of terrain, including forests, swamps,

thickets, rocky areas, and mountains. In the Pacific Northwest, they prefer dense coniferous forests during the day for resting. As nocturnal mammals, they prowl and hunt at night, sometimes through clear-cut open areas.

Female bobcats have smaller home ranges (averaging 1295 ha or 5 mi²) than males (up to 20,720 ha or 80 mi²). Home range size is strongly influenced by prey availability and weather conditions, and greatest movement occurs during spring and summer months.

Behavior and Feeding

Bobcats are strictly carnivorous and prey on a variety of animals, including rabbits and hares, small rodents, birds, reptiles, and insects. Infrequently, bobcats may pursue larger prey like young black-tailed deer.

During breeding season, bobcats caterwaul, and when they feel threatened, they spit, growl, and hiss to ward off predators. They are stealthy predators with excellent vision, especially at night, and sharp claws and canines that are ideal for catching prey.

Reproduction and Life Cycle

They are a solitary species, but males and females associate during the breeding season through their entire life span. Females can have a litter of one to five kittens per year and they raise them for about one year before separation. It takes females one year to reach sexual maturity and two years for males to reach sexual maturity. They can live up to 14 years in the wild and have few predators; however, some threats to life include cougars, hunting and trapping, speeding cars, downed power lines, porcupine quills and obstruction of habitat due to urban development and agriculture.

Conservation

Bobcats are not listed as an Endangered

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Species. However, they were at risk before restrictions on hunting and trapping were made. In 1973, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) treaty was created to protect the cheetah, leopard, jaguar, and ocelot from being killed for fur. But *Lynx rufus* was not accounted for until it became a huge target for fur traders. In 1982, Congress settled this problem in an amendment that limits the number of bobcat trapping and hunting licenses sold. In Oregon, one must possess a valid furbearer or hunting license and only hunt during the bobcat harvest season. Bobcat kills are limited to five in eastern Oregon and zero in western Oregon per year. In California, the same rules apply and there is a statewide limit of five bobcat kills.

Where to See

Bobcats are present in all Klamath Network parks. However, they are very secretive and are rarely seen in the wild (except on trail cameras).



Linda Tanner, Creative Commons

Bobcat walking in urban area. Bobcats sometimes use roads and trails to avoid deep snow areas that limit mobility.

More Information

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/b/bobcat/>

<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/bobcat>

bobcat audio clip:

<https://www.freesoundeffects.com/free-sounds/bobcat-10018/>