

# Welcome to the Bobcat Habitat



## ***Bobcat Classification***

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Carnivora

**Family:** Felidae

**Genus:** *Lynx*

**Species:** *rufus*

**Subspecies (Southern U.S):** *floridanus*



## **Who Are Bobcats?**

The bobcat is one of 37 species comprising the Felidae family, the second largest family in the order Carnivora, and is one of four members of the *Lynx* genus, which also includes the Canada lynx (*L. canadensis*), the Iberian lynx (*L. pardinus*) and the Eurasian lynx (*L. lynx*). They are widely dispersed throughout North America, from southern Canada to southern Mexico. Currently there are 12 recognized subspecies—Florida bobcats belong to the *L.r.floridanus* subspecies. The bobcat's genus name, *Lynx*, comes from the Greek word *Leukos*, meaning bright eyes—probably in reference to the tendency of Lynx eyes to reflect light. *Rufus* is Latin for red, in reference to the bobcat's coloration. There are approximately 725,000 to 1,020,000 bobcats in the wilderness.

Bobcats look a lot like their closest relative, the lynx, but have shorter legs and smaller feet. They are shy, elusive, and mostly silent. However, they yowl and hiss during mating season, and when confronted by an enemy, they may snarl and spit when confronted by an enemy.

## **What Do They Look Like?**

An adult bobcat is usually about two to three feet in length, including its tail, and it weighs 15 to 35 pounds. The bobcat's skeleton is very similar to that of the domestic cat, but it is about twice as big as the average cat. They exhibit sexual size dimorphism with males typically larger and heavier than females. Bobcats from northern areas typically weigh more than those from the southern regions.

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Bobcats' fur color can be anything from light grey to yellowish brown to reddish or tawny brown. Their markings can be tabby cat-like stripes or spots—some bobcats have so many spots that they look almost black. A bobcat's tail is usually short (or bobbed), and is often marked by two or three black bars with a black tip above and pale or white below. Their faces have broken black lines that radiate onto a broad cheek ruff and they have short ear tufts. Bobcats in the southern parts of their range are usually darker and smaller than those in the northern parts.

### What Are Their Senses Like?

Bobcats have 28 teeth, with large canines that are structured to be efficient for stabbing and holding their prey. Bobcats have binocular vision, which is due to their large eyes that are set forward in their skulls. The unique placement of a bobcat's eyes gives it good depth perception, allowing it to have accurate judging distance. Bobcats also have good peripheral vision and they see well in low light, since they are most active at night. Bobcats can also see colors, but it is believed that their ability to do so is much more limited than in humans.

Nevertheless, when bobcats cannot rely on their night vision, they need a good sense of touch to be able to locate their prey. Bobcats' whiskers are very sensitive and are used to sense where prey are just before they bite—this allows them to protect their eyes by closing them, but still know the position of the prey animal.

In addition to their vision and sense of touch, bobcats have a powerful sense of smell that they use to communicate with each other. They also have a good sense of hearing that they use to locate prey and to avoid dangerous situations. Bobcats can hear a much wider range of sound frequencies than humans can, and they can pivot their ears towards sounds for amplification. However, they do not have a well-developed sense of taste. They can taste sour, bitter, and salty flavors, but do not have receptors that are able to taste sweet.



### What Kind of Tracks Do They Make?

The bobcat's track (the indentation its paws make in the ground) is round and about twice as big as the track of a domestic cat. You can see four toes but no claws, since bobcats walk on their toes.



They have four toes on their hind feet and five on their front feet; the fifth is raised and appears to be vestigial. Bobcat toes are equipped with sharp claws. The claws are retracted into the paw when not in use, which helps them remain sharp.

When bobcats need to use their claws, for subduing prey or climbing a tree, they contract the muscles in their toes, extending their claws beyond their protective sheaths.

### What Is Their Place in Nature?

Bobcats have an important position in the food chain. They are opportunistic and prey on many species of mammals and birds. Bobcats are strictly meat eaters—their main diet staples are rabbits and rodents, but they also eat small hoofed mammals, large ground birds, and sometimes reptiles, bird eggs, road kill, insects, porcupines, and even deer.

### Are They Endangered?

Bobcat populations have managed to remain strong despite threats. In the 1970s, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) stopped sales of leopard, cheetah, ocelot, and other spotted cat skins, which led to increased hunting of the bobcat. Luckily for the bobcat, interest in wearing fur has declined. Today, most bobcat subspecies are not considered endangered. The Mexican bobcat, which lives in central Mexico, is the only subspecies that is listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The bobcat is not on the state of Florida's endangered species list.



Foxes, coyotes, bears, large owls, and adult male bobcats prey upon bobcat kittens, but cougars and humans are the only real threats to adult bobcats.

### What Kinds of Adaptations Have They Made?

One of the bobcat's strengths is its adaptability. Bobcat populations survive in many different types of environments, and can even flourish near urban and suburban areas (although they are very

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reclusive and therefore aren't seen much). Bobcats need thick vegetation that is close to the ground, with patches of openings that allow them to stalk prey to hunt successfully. Even environments that are heavily influenced by humans can provide these characteristics. Scientists are studying bobcats that are moving back into territories that they had abandoned.

Researchers have found that high levels of biodiversity are linked to the presence of carnivores in an environment. This means that the ability of bobcats to thrive in areas in which humans have made great inroads may help increase biodiversity. However, we don't know how much and in what ways habitat destruction will affect the bobcat. For example, the conversion of forests and grasslands to farms can disperse the prey that bobcats need to survive.



### How Do They Hunt?

The bobcat hunts mostly by using sight and sound, and usually sits or crouches until it identifies potential prey. To hunt small prey, the bobcat will remain motionless until the animal comes close enough, and then the bobcat will pounce on it. The bobcat hunts medium-size animals by stalking them until they are close enough to dash toward, and then the bobcat will pounce. Bobcats can also ambush prey by jumping from a tree. They will attack animals that are much larger than they are (like deer) when the prey animals are asleep.

### Where Do Bobcats Live?

Bobcats are only found in North America. They are most plentiful in the far west, from Idaho, Utah, and Nevada to the Pacific Coast and from Washington to Baja California in Mexico. Bobcats are scarce in much of Midwest, but they can be found in regions throughout Florida.



One of the reasons that Bobcats have survived so well is that they can adapt to many different types of habitats including the deep forest, swamps, hammock land, farmland, mountains, woods, prairie, and desert. In Florida, thick patches of saw palmetto and dense shrub thickets provide prime locations for dens.

### What Is Their Habitat in the Wild Like?

Bobcats live in both rural and urban areas. In the wild the size of a bobcat's territory is determined by the amount of prey available.

When there is more prey, territories can be smaller. In rural areas bobcat territories can cover five or six square miles (or even more), while in urban and suburban areas they are usually only a

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couple of miles because of a lack of open territory. Bobcats will cross roads that have light traffic, but they don't like highways. They might be seen in backyards on the edges of open areas but they usually don't travel into neighborhoods.



Their fur provides excellent camouflage both on the ground and in trees. Like domestic cats, bobcats don't really like the water, but they will swim if necessary.

### Where Do They Live?

Bobcats sleep in dens. An adult bobcat may have several dens in its territory. The main den is usually a cave or a rock shelter, but bobcats also use hollow logs and fallen trees. Bobcats set up auxiliary dens for shelter in the outer portions of their ranges. These are often made of brush piles, rock ledges, or stumps.

During the day bobcats will find a good hiding place in which to rest, like in a rock cleft or thicket, and they are also expert climbers and will sit or lie on boulders or tree branches.

## How Do Bobcat Families Live?

Bobcat families are a lot like those of domestic cats. Males and females are not lifelong partners; they only stay together long enough for courtship and mating, and both males and females may have more than one mate. Males do not help raise the young.

Bobcats are solitary animals, and they each have their own home territory. A male's territory can overlap with one or more females' territories, but female territories never overlap. Bobcats mark their territories with urine or feces deposits to let other bobcats know that they should stay away. They also mark their territories by scratching on trees and stumps—bobcat claw marks can be seen 2 to 3 feet above the ground.

### What Is Their Life Cycle?

The bobcat's mating season is late winter. Gestation is 62 days, and kittens are born in the spring (females have one litter per year). Litters can contain 1 to 4 kittens, but the average litter size is 2. Females may use the same den sites for several years in a row, and they prepare them by scraping dried grass, leaves, moss, and other soft vegetation into the den. At birth the kittens are blind and helpless but have already developed a thick coat of spotted fur; their eyes open at about nine days old. At one month the kittens begin to eat some solid food and move outside of the den; they are weaned from their mother's milk at about two months and they learn to hunt at about five months.



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When they are between 8 and 11 months old they have to leave their mother's territory and go out on their own. Females reach sexual maturity at about 1 year of age, but they don't usually produce their first litter until they are 2 years old. Males do not mate until their second year. Bobcats can live up to 12 years in the wild, but they usually survive 3 to 4 years. They can survive as long as 25 years in captivity.

### How Much Energy Do They Use?

Bobcats are crepuscular or bimodal—they are in motion the most during dawn and dusk. At night they spend much time moving, resting for 2- or 3-hour periods at a time. Because of all this movement, bobcats expend a lot of energy. We think that males expend a minimum of 1121 kilocalories of energy over a 24-hour period and that females expend 738 kilocalories. They can range as far as 6 miles in a day. A bobcat's territory must have enough prey living in it to create fuel for all this energy.



### A Wild Bobcat's Typical Day

*3PM-5PM:* Foraging for food in a small area

*5PM-9PM:* Long distance movement across its territory

*9PM to 11PM:* Resting and foraging

*11PM-1AM:* Long distance movement

*1AM-3AM:* Rest

*3AM-9AM:* Long distance movement and foraging

*9AM-3PM:* Rest

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