



Natural History of Bobcats

Known for their distinctive bobbed tail, bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are medium-sized carnivores that inhabit a variety of different habitats in Colorado and look similar to their cousins, Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*).

Physical characteristics of bobcats

Bobcats are about the size of a domestic cat and males tend to be larger than females. Although their body size varies widely, adult females average 16 pounds and males average 22 pounds. They measure between 20 and 50 inches in length. If not hunted or trapped, bobcats can live until 15 years in the wild.

Bobcats can be best identified by their short-bobbed tail, measuring 2 to 8 inches. The tail has 3 to 6 black stripes on the top and white on the underside (unlike lynx who have a uniform tail).

The bobcat has a wide, flat face with longer fur on the cheek area. Bobcats' pelage, or coat, is spotted and widely variable in color from gray, brown to yellowish brown. Their spots act as camouflage. Bobcats' bellies are white, and some with black spots.

Bobcats are smaller than lynx, have shorter ear tufts and their feet are not as furry—an adaptation lynx enjoy for walking atop deep snow.

Habitat & Range

Bobcats have a wide habitat tolerance and can live in almost any natural habitat that provides cover, which they require to hunt. In Colorado, bobcats occupy all ecosystems including riparian woodlands on the eastern plains, but they prefer the rocky and broken outcrops of foothills and canyonlands in pinyon-juniper woodlands and montane forest habitats.

Bobcats tend to avoid deep snow—the domain of the lynx and wolverine urban, exurban, and agricultural areas. However, bobcats can adapt to many different habitats, which is a beneficial trait for their survival.

Their home range is a fixed area that includes necessary resources for life, such as prey, water, and denning sites where mothers can rear their kittens.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) has no reliable statewide bobcat population or population trend data; it is wholly reliant on untrustworthy, anecdotal data including from hunter surveys, sightings, and vehicle collisions.



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Bobcat prey types & hunting methods

Bobcats are opportunistic hunters and will consume a wide variety of prey types. They compete for food resources with coyotes, and, to a lesser extent, with mountain lions.

Bobcats' main prey include snowshoe hares, rabbits, jackrabbits, mice, squirrels and beavers. These "petite predators" also prey on birds, lizards, snakes, small mammals, and fawns of white-tailed deer and bighorn sheep. Road-, hunter-, and winter-killed deer are important sources of food.

Bobcats stalk and ambush their prey at night. Like other wild felids, they use their claws and jaws to grapple prey. Cats' claws also permit them to scale trees and cliffs.

Bobcats usually hunt on the ground but will also pursue prey, such as squirrels, in trees as well as fish, amphibians and waterfowl in shallow water. Bobcats will occasionally cache carcasses with a covering of dirt or snow to consume over time.

Rearing of young

Female bobcats are able to reproduce at nine to twelve months of age but usually give birth after they are two years old. Bobcats can reproduce year-round but typically breed during winter and spring, with most young born during the spring and summer months.

Females usually choose a secluded den, such as in a hollow tree, log, cave, or rocky crevice, to raise their litter of two to four kittens, and will often move their kittens around between multiple dens sites to prevent detection from other predators. In more urban habitats, they have been known to den in backyards, using storage sheds, barns, and the spaces under buildings.

Bobcat kittens depend on their mothers for survival for eight to ten months but can remain with their mothers until up to two years of age before dispersal. They are weaned at approximately two to three months of age, after which they follow their

mothers on daily hunts. By winter, kittens make their own kills.

Once kittens are self-sufficient, typically between nine and twenty-four months of age, they are considered by biologists as "transients" and leave their dens to find their own home range and mates. Distance traveled varies widely among young bobcats. The longest documented dispersals were recorded in Idaho when two young males traveled 158 km and 182 km.

Threats to survival

CPW's data show that trophy hunters and trappers cause most bobcat mortalities in Colorado — between 93 and 96 percent of all identified mortalities. During the 2017-18 season, for instance, CPW data show that a record 2,009 bobcats were intentionally killed. Over the last decade, hunters and trappers have killed an average of nearly 1,700 bobcats annually, while only an average of 18 bobcats were killed with landowner and game damage permits during that time.



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