



# BOBCAT

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#004 Rangeland Wildlife Factsheet Series

## The Flourishing Feline



PHOTO BY: REED BOWMAN

### Breeding



### Habitat



### Status



**SCIENTIFIC NAME:** *Lynx rufus floridanus*

**SYNONYMS:** Wildcat, bay lynx, lynx cat, pallid lynx

**HABITAT:** All habitats, including urban areas

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** Twice as large as a domestic cat with brown/tan and white fur, small black spots and a short “bobbed” tail tipped with black. Back of ears black with white spot, short snout and often a “ruff” around the neck.

**WEIGHT:** Ranges from 15-35 lbs, males typically larger than females

**DEMOGRAPHIC RATE:** 50-60 day gestation, 1-4 kittens/litter

**LIFESPAN:** 3-4 years in the wild. Oldest reported bobcat in the wild 16 y/old and in captivity 32 y/old.

**DISPERSAL:** Kittens disperse around 8 months.



PHOTO BY: SUMMER M. TRIBBLE

**BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR:** Bobcats are members of the cat family (Felidae) and are habitat generalists, meaning they will use almost all habitats, including urban areas, beaches, and some agricultural areas. They prefer areas with thick cover for hunting. They will commonly climb trees or swim in search of food, and are often found sunning and sheltering among branches. Bobcats are opportunistic carnivores and will eat whatever they can catch. Although they prefer rabbits and rodents, bobcats will also eat small reptiles, birds, feral cats, carrion, eggs, and occasionally deer or small livestock. Bobcats do most of their hunting at dawn, dusk, and through the night. Adult bobcats are solitary and males and females are only found together during the breeding season, August-March. Female bobcats are sexually mature around one year old, and males around two years. Dens are usually in hollow logs, dense vegetation, or under rocks. Only female bobcats care for the young, and they will stay with her until the next breeding season.

### Did You Know?

Bobcats will cover a large kill with dirt, grass, or leaves and return to it later –called “caching.”

# BOBCAT FAST FACTS

- Usually only sleep for 2-3 hours at a time
- Keen sense of hearing and vision, can see in the dark to hunt at night
- Melanistic (all black) bobcats have been sighted about a dozen times in southern Florida



NatureServe and IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). 2016. Lynx rufus. <http://www.iucnredlist.org>

**DISTRIBUTION:** Bobcats are present in most of North America and exhibit a clinal gradient from the largest in Canada to the smallest in Mexico. Their range is expanding northward in Canada, following trends of increased forest clearing and warmer winters. Bobcats are present in all contiguous U.S. states except Delaware, where they are believed to have been extirpated. In Florida, bobcats can be found in all 67 counties, although they have not been spotted on the islands of the Florida Keys in several decades. Florida scientists have reported a recent decrease in bobcat populations. Reasons for the decline are unknown and state wildlife officials do not believe bobcat populations are currently at risk. Home range size for bobcats in rural or undeveloped areas, are around 5-6 mi<sup>2</sup> and in urban or suburban areas decrease to 1-2 mi<sup>2</sup>. Male bobcats have larger home ranges than females.

## Tracks



**HISTORY:** Between 1.8 and 3.8 million years ago, the lynxes made an evolutionary split from the rest of the big cats. The Issoire lynx is believed to be the first ancestor of the bobcat that crossed from Eurasia to North America. The first North American evidence of this ancestral lynx species was found in Texas, and dates back 2.4

to 2.5 million years. The Issoire lynx evolved into the bobcat as we know it today, between 1.8 million and 10,000 years ago.



**HOW LONG CAN THIS FELID FLOURISH?** In a time when wild cat populations around the world are declining, many might wonder why bobcats are thriving throughout most of their range. There is no single definitive answer as the resilience of bobcats can be attributed to many factors. It may be partly due to their generalist nature using a variety of habitat and food resources. These generalist's traits allow them to adapt quickly to changes such as human population growth, increased development, and landscape alterations — trends that have had severe negative impacts on other cat species, such as the Florida panther (*Puma concolor coryi*). Bobcats are a small wild felid that require relatively small areas of habitat for a home range, allowing them to survive in many more parts of a fragmented landscape than a larger cat could. However, this adaptability and resilience is limited, and a decline in bobcats has recently been observed in Florida. Rapid development in Florida may be reaching a threshold that even bobcat are unable to persist within. Since predators are a critical component of a healthy ecosystem, it is important to monitor bobcat populations and implement conservation actions where needed. Bobcats are native to Florida and conserving and connecting tracts of suitable habitat for bobcats and their prey may help stabilize populations, and prevent bobcats from joining so many of their feline cousins on the list of threatened and endangered species.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Support wildlife on your property by growing native plants and areas of cover.
- Reduce urban conflicts by securing garbage cans, protecting small livestock such as chickens, and avoid leaving pet food outside.
- Avoid using poisons to kill rodents or other pests - these harmful toxins can be ingested by bobcats and other native wildlife.

More information at [www.rangelandwildlife.com](http://www.rangelandwildlife.com), <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>, & [www.myfwc.com](http://www.myfwc.com)