

## Florida Bobcat

*Lynx rufus floridanus*

Bobcats are roughly twice as big as the average house cat and can be up to 24 inches tall at the shoulder. They have long legs, and large paws. The short tail can be up to eight inches long and appears “bobbed.” Hence, the name bobcat.

Most bobcats are brown or brownish red with a white underbelly and short, black-tipped tail. A few melanistic bobcats have been sighted and captured in Florida which are dark, almost black, but which still exhibit a spot pattern.

Like the Florida Panther, the Florida Bobcat is a distinct subspecies. Twelve bobcat subspecies are currently recognized in North America: *Lynx rufus floridanus* is found in the southeastern United States and inland to the Mississippi valley, up to southwestern Missouri and southern Illinois.

The largest-bodied bobcats are from eastern Canada and northern New England, subspecies (*L. r. gigas*), while the smallest are from the southeastern subspecies (*L. r. floridanus*). The bobcat is muscular, and its hind legs are longer than its front legs, giving it a bobbing gait.

Like most felines, the bobcat is largely solitary, but ranges will often overlap. Unusual for cats, males are more tolerant of overlap, while females rarely wander into others’ ranges. Given their smaller range sizes, two or more females may reside within a male’s home range. When multiple male territories overlap, a dominance hierarchy is often established.

The bobcat is crepuscular (primarily active at dawn and dusk). It keeps on the move from three hours before sunset until about midnight, and then again from before dawn until three hours after sunrise. Each night it will move from 2 to 7 miles along its habitual route. This behavior may vary seasonally, as bobcats become more diurnal during fall and winter in re-



sponse to the activity of their prey, which are more active during the day in colder months

The bobcat is able to survive for long periods without food but will eat heavily when prey is abundant. It is the primary predator of small game with the cottontail rabbit the preferred food. It also feeds heavily on large rodents such as the hispid cotton rat. During lean periods, it will often prey on larger animals and return to feed on later.

The bobcat hunts animals of different sizes by adjusting its hunting techniques accordingly. With small animals, such as rats, mice, birds, fish, and insects, it will hunt in areas known to be abundant in prey by lying, crouching, or standing, and wait for victims to wander close. It will then pounce, grabbing its prey with its sharp, retractable claws. For slightly larger animals such as rabbits, it will stalk from cover and wait until they come within 20 to 35 feet before rushing in to attack. It has been known to kill deer, especially in winter when smaller prey is scarce, or when deer populations become more abundant. One study in the Everglades showed a large majority of kills (33 of

39) were fawns. Prey up to eight times the bobcat’s weight could be successfully taken.

Bobcats breed in February and March. A male and female will travel and hunt together for a few days, engaging in chasing and bumping behavior sometimes accompanied by loud screams, hisses or deep growls. Both males and females may mate several times with different partners. Bobcats remain reproductively active throughout their lives.

Each bobcat may have several dens, one main den and several additional dens in its territory. The main den (natal den) can be a hollow log, fallen tree, or some other protected place. Auxiliary dens are in less visited portions of the home range and are often brush piles or stumps.

After two months of gestation, the female gives birth to two to four young. Their eyes open by day ten, they begin exploring at a month and are weaned at two months. Their mother will bring them birds and small mammals and begin teaching them to kill. They start traveling at three to five months and will be hunting on their own by the fall. They usually disperse shortly after that.

By the time the female mates again the following winter, the previous year’s young will be on their own.

The young bobcats are vulnerable to virtually any carnivore, including owls, eagles, and foxes, as well as other adult male bobcats; when prey populations are not abundant, fewer kittens are likely to reach adulthood. Juveniles have high mortality rates and are susceptible to ticks and fleas, as well as internal parasites, some of which they pick up from rabbits and squirrels.

The adult bobcat has few predators other than humans, although it may be killed in interspecific conflict. Diseases, accidents, hunters, automobiles, and starvation are the other leading causes of death.

Bobcats typically live to six or eight years of age, with a few reaching beyond ten.