

# Bobcat

*Lynx Rufus*



## Other common names

None

## Introduction

Bobcats are the most common wildcat in North America. Their name comes from the stubby tail, which looks as though it has been bobbed. They are about twice the size of a domestic housecat, and half the size of a Canada lynx. Public sightings of bobcats are often confused for the larger and much more elusive Canada lynx. Bobcats are secretive creatures and will avoid humans, so they are rarely seen in the wild, but you can see signs of their activities around Dyken Pond. They are the only species of wild cat that breeds in the area.

## Physical Description and Anatomy

Bobcats have dense, soft fur that changes with the seasons. In the summer it is shorter and reddish, and in winter it is longer and grey. The fur along the cheeks is longer, and there may be small black tufts on the pointed ears. The backs of the ears have white or grey patches.



Bobcat skull.

There are often dark spots and stripes along the body and around the head and face, but these vary greatly between individuals.

Individuals weigh between 9 – 34 pounds (4.1 – 15.4 kg), and are 26 – 43 inches (66.0 – 109.2 cm) long. The males are about 1/3 larger than females. Average males are 21 lbs (9.5 kg) and 34 inches (86.4 cm), while females are on average 14 lbs (6.4 kg) and 30 inches (76.2 cm), and the tail on both sexes is 5 – 6 inches (12.7 – 15.2 cm) long.



Close up of bobcat markings.



Bobcat pelt.

### Identifying features (tracks, scat, calls)

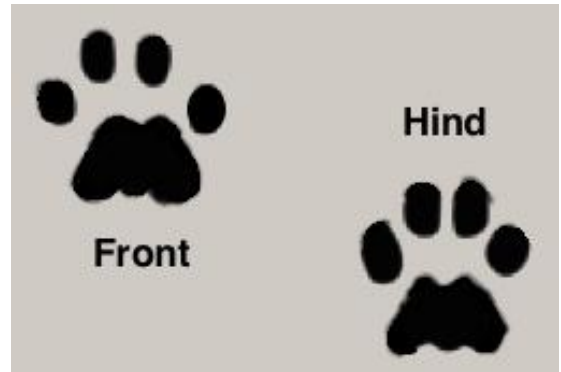
The bobcat has smaller feet than the lynx, which has oversized paws, as well as smaller ear tufts. Bobcats also lack the distinctive black tip present on the tail of the lynx, and are generally about half the size of a lynx. Look for tracks in mud and fresh snow.

Bobcats use scent markings, urine, and feces to mark their territory, often on the underside of logs, leaning trees, sheltering rocks, and stumps.

Vocalizations can be heard, more often during breeding season, and include screams, howls, squeals, hisses, and spits.



Bobcat scat.



Bobcat tracks.

Front:  $1 \frac{5}{8}$  –  $2 \frac{1}{2}$  long by  $1 \frac{3}{8}$  –  $2 \frac{5}{8}$  inches wide

Hind:  $1 \frac{9}{16}$  –  $2 \frac{1}{2}$  inches long by  $1 \frac{3}{16}$  –  $2 \frac{5}{8}$  inches wide



Bobcat tracks.



Bobcat tracks.

## Habitat

Bobcats occupy brush fields, wooded farmlands, evergreen bogs and swamps, and deciduous forests. They require places for refuge and protection like brush piles, hollow trees, fallen logs, and rocky ledges or rock piles. They use these places for shelter, breeding, and raising young. They can be found in large patches of isolated habitat, but will abandon areas with increasing human encroachment. Bobcats prefer habitats with sufficient understory vegetation to support high prey density, including rabbits and rodents.

## Behavior and Diet

Bobcats are solitary animals and establish a home territory which they mark with scent and defend against intruders.

They are mainly nocturnal or crepuscular, but may be active at any time of day or night. They are opportunistic carnivores, feeding on rodents, ground nesting birds, bats, reptiles and amphibians, small livestock, domestic animals, and even roadkill. In New York their diet is primarily made up of deer and rabbits. Their feeding behavior changes seasonally, and they feed on deer more often in the winter when other prey is harder to find. Rather than targeting healthy adult deer, they will focus on young or sickly animals to reduce the risk of injury to themselves. Bobcats may cache larger prey for future use, and a single deer



Bobcat tree scratching.

carcass can last for several weeks. It is not uncommon for individuals to die of starvation in especially harsh winters. They may also be injured by their target prey. Bobcat kittens are prey for foxes, owls, and adult male bobcats. If they avoid these difficulties, they can live 12 – 13 years in the wild.

## Human Interactions

Because bobcats avoid human interaction, there are rarely conflicts between our species. If a bobcat does approach humans, it is likely sick, rabid, or possibly emboldened by the risk of starvation. Up until 1971, New York State paid a bounty for harvested bobcats. Today, New York State allows hunting and trapping with appropriate permits.

Bobcats have the ability to hybridize with the closely related Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*). The two species already share many similar characteristics, so identifying hybrids is difficult and often requires genetic testing. Because of this, the number of existing hybrids is unknown. The existence of hybrids can make protection of the endangered lynx difficult. It can also cause confusion for hunters when they take an animal they believe to be a legal bobcat, but genetic testing shows lynx DNA.

## Reproduction

Female bobcats are sexually mature in their first year, and males in their second year. Individuals are polygamous, and males are not involved in rearing young. They breed between mid-January and mid-February, with gestation of 50 – 70 days. Litters of 1 – 5 kittens are born in April and May, and the female will have several auxiliary dens to help raise the young. Kittens are blind at birth, opening their eyes after 8 – 10 days. They nurse for two months, and begin leaving the den with the mother at three months. Young disperse in autumn and winter, prior to the next breeding season.

## Fun Facts

Bobcats can travel 7 – 12 ft (2.1 – 3.7 m) in a single leap.

While the average lifespan of bobcats in the wild is 12 – 13 years, the record from one wild individual in the Adirondacks was 16 – 17 years, and a captive bobcat lived to be 25.

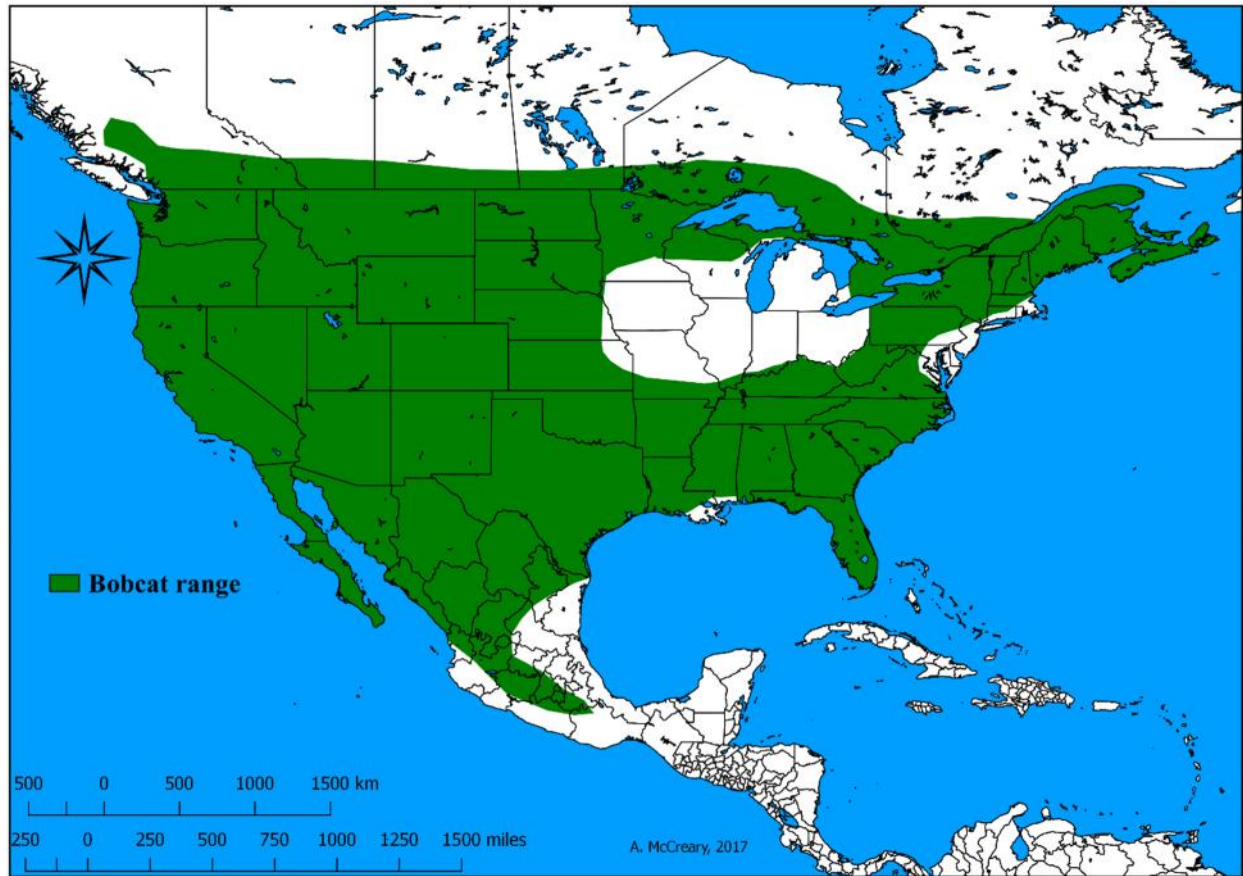
Bobcats can hybridize with the Canada lynx.

Unlike your pet cat Fluffy, bobcats are known to wade and swim in pursuit of prey.

## Range and Status

Bobcats range from southern Canada throughout most of the United States and into Mexico. Bobcat populations may be linked to populations of prey species like white-tailed deer, and fluctuate from interactions with other predators, including coyotes, wolves, and lynx. Expanding bobcat populations may have displaced the lynx in some areas. In New York, bobcats are protected and managed as a small game species. They can be found almost everywhere in New

York except Long Island. The major threat to this feline is habitat loss and encroachment by human activities.



## Management and Research in New York

The NYS Management Plan for bobcat in NYS 2012-2017 provides for sustainable harvesting of bobcats in New York. The goal is to sustain or enhance populations to allow for the continued enjoyment and utilization of the species. Currently, there are efforts to improve monitoring programs to obtain more accurate estimates of populations across the state.

## At Dyken Pond

Bobcats are common on the Rensselaer Plateau. However, they are seldom seen due to their elusive behavior. You are more likely to find evidence of their activities than the animals themselves. Look for these signs near rocky outcrops and ledges, and keep an eye out for their tracks in fresh snow.

## Links

More information on bobcats can be found at the following links:

## DEC Bobcat Management Plan

[http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife\\_pdf/finalbmp2012.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/wildlife_pdf/finalbmp2012.pdf)

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