



Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)



Also known as: bay lynx, red lynx

French: Chat Sauvage, Lynx Roux

Spanish: Lince, Lince Rojo

Kingdom Animalia

Phylum Chordata

Class Mammalia

Order Carnivora

Family Felidae

Genus *Lynx* (1)

Size Head-body length: 65 - 105 cm (2)
Shoulder height: 45 - 58 cm (2)
Tail length: 9 - 11 cm (3)

Weight 5.8 - 13.3 kg (4)

STATUS

The bobcat is classified as Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List (1), and listed on Appendix II of CITES (5).

DESCRIPTION

Owing its common name to its short 'bobbed' tail (4) (6), the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) has the widest distribution of any native cat in North America (7) Like other lynxes, it has long legs relative to its body size, a small head and a ruff of fur that extends from the ears to the jowls (2) (4) (6). The ears are large, but the black tufts at the tips are less conspicuous than those of its **congeners**, and may be absent entirely (2) (3) (6). The coat is short, soft and dense, and is generally various shades of buff brown, although some may have a rufous tint, and marked with dark streaks and spots (3). The undersides are lighter in colour with black spots, and the short tail has a black tip on the upper side but is white underneath (2) (3) (6) (8). Males are typically larger than females, and there is also significant geographic variation in size, with bobcats in the north tending to be larger than those in the south (6) (8). Twelve **subspecies** of the bobcat are currently recognised (8).

RANGE

The bobcat has a wide distribution stretching from British Columbia, east through southern Canada to Nova Scotia, and south through most of the United States to central Mexico (6). Its range is increasing northward with forest clearance (3). Although it once occurred throughout the contiguous United States, it was extirpated from the intensively cultivated midwest and the heavily populated east coast (1) (6). Populations in these areas now seem to be increasing, and the bobcat is reported as living in every state except Delaware (3).

HABITAT

Inhabits an extremely wide variety of habitats, including boreal and coniferous forests, scrubland, swamps, deserts and mountains (1) (2) (6) (8). However, the bobcat tends to prefer areas with dense cover, or uneven broken terrain, providing both concealment and relief from inclement weather (6).

BIOLOGY

Although the bobcat is generally most active around sunset and sunrise, in some parts of its range it is more **nocturnal**, while in other areas it is commonly seen during the daytime, particular over winter, when prey is more scarce (2) (6). An exclusive **carnivore**, the bobcat's diet is dominated by rabbits and hares, but it will also take a wide variety of other prey, ranging in size from mice to deer (2) (4) (6) (7). It is capable of taking prey with a weight at ten times its own body weight (3). Being a patient hunter, it either sits and waits in ambush along game trails and at burrow entrances, or will patrol its range stealthily, all the time looking and listening for prey, which is captured with a short burst of speed (2) (6).

Like most other cats, the bobcat has a primarily solitary lifestyle, with individuals generally avoiding each other except during the breeding season (2) (6). Home territories are widely variable depending on the habitat, and range from 6 to 325 square kilometres (3). Males and females both maintain their territories by scent-marking, using faeces, urine, scrapes and anal secretions (2) (6) (7). Male home ranges generally overlap with those of other males as well as females (3).

Normally, a mature female bobcat will produce a single litter each year, with a peak breeding season between February and April (2) (6). The **gestation** period lasts around 63 days, with the average litter size being around three kittens, but up to as many as six (2) (6) (7). At three to five months old, the young begin to travel with the mother, and typically remain dependant until around seven months of age, but eventually disperse outside of the natal range (6). Females are ready to breed when just a year old, while males do not mate until their second year (2) (7).

THREATS

Despite being the most traded felid in the international skin trade, thanks to good management, trade is not currently thought to threaten the survival of the bobcat. Instead the greatest perceived threat to this species is habitat loss. In addition there is some concern over the threat of increased competition with expanding coyote populations in parts of the bobcat's range as well as the localised persecution of the bobcat as a pest on domestic livestock (1).

CONSERVATION

Since 1975, the bobcat has been listed on Appendix II of CITES, which prohibits trade in this species without a permit (1) (6). Efforts have also been made to reintroduce the bobcat to parts of its original historical range, including New Jersey and Cumberland Island, Georgia (6).

FIND OUT MORE

Find out more about the bobcat and its conservation:

- International Society for Endangered Cats (ISEC) Canada:
<http://www.wildcatconservation.org>

Find out more about the bobcat:

- MacDonald, D.W. and Loveridge, A.J. (2010) *Biology and Conservation of Wild Felids*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Wilson, D.E. and Mittermeier, R.A. (2009) *Handbook of Mammals of the World, Volume 1: Carnivores*. Lynx Edicions International, Barcelona.

AUTHENTICATION

Authenticated (24/01/2011) by Pat Bumstead, Director of the International Society for Endangered Cats (ISEC) Canada,
www.wildcatconservation.org

GLOSSARY

- **Carnivore**: an organism that feeds on flesh. The term can also be used to refer to a mammal in the order Carnivora.
- **Congeners**: Species belonging to the same genus.
- **Gestation**: The state of being pregnant; the period from conception to birth.
- **Nocturnal**: active at night.
- **Subspecies**: A population usually restricted to a geographical area that differs from other populations of the same species, but not to the extent of being classified as a separate species.

REFERENCES

1. IUCN Red List (August, 2009)
<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>
2. Nowak, R.M. (1999) *Walker's Mammals of the World*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.
3. Bumstead, P. (January, 2011) *Pers. comm.*
4. Burnie, D. (2001) *Animal*. Dorling Kindersley, London.
5. CITES (August, 2009)
<http://www.cites.org>

6. Sunquist, M. and Sunquist, F. (2002) *Wild Cats of the World*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
7. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History - Bobcat (October, 2009)
http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image_info.cfm?species_id=144
8. Lariviere, S. and Walton, L.R. (1997) Lynx rufus. *Mammalian Species*, **563**: 1-8.