



## Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*)



**Also known as:** Canadian lynx

**French:** Lynx Du Canada

**Spanish:** Lince Del Canadá, Lince LeI Canadá

**Kingdom** Animalia

**Phylum** Chordata

**Class** Mammalia

**Order** Carnivora

**Family** Felidae

**Genus** *Lynx* (1)

**Size** Head-body length: 76 - 106 cm (2)  
Average shoulder height: 48 - 56 cm (3)  
Tail length: 5 - 12 cm (2)  
Average weight: 5 - 17 kg (3)

### STATUS

The Canada lynx is classified as Least Concern (LC) on the IUCN Red List (1) and listed on Appendix II of CITES (3).

### DESCRIPTION

The Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) is a muscular, leggy cat with forelimbs that are slightly shorter than the hind-limbs, lending it a slightly stooped appearance (3) (4). In common with other lynx species, the triangular ears are tipped with conspicuous tufts of black hair, while the lengthy cheek hair gives the impression of a ruff around the neck, especially over winter (3) (5). A particularly characteristic feature is the large paws, which spread widely and are covered in long, dense fur, enabling the lynx to run on the surface of deep snow (3) (5) (6). Although somewhat variable, the long, thick coat is typically buff grey and unmarked (2). The upperparts may have a grey, frosted appearance in winter, and the undersides are light in colour with mottled dark spots. The tail is stubby and the tip is completely black (3) (5). There is little geographic variation in size, but males are slightly larger than the females (3).

### RANGE

Endemic to North America, the Canada lynx occurs from the Arctic treeline, south through much of Alaska and Canada, into northern parts of the contiguous United States (3). The distribution broadly mirrors that of its main prey, the snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*). While it still occurs through 95 percent of its historical range in Canada, it has been lost from large areas of the United States (1) (3).

### HABITAT

The Canada lynx is generally found in dense boreal forests, especially where snowshoe hare densities are high, but it may also venture into open forests and rocky areas (1) (3) (5) (7).

## BIOLOGY

The natural history of the Canada lynx is inextricably linked with that of its primary prey, the snowshoe hare (3). Indeed, the often cited lynx-hare cycle refers to the synchronous fluctuations observed in snowshoe hare and Canada lynx populations, with cyclical 8 to 11 year peaks in the hare population generally being followed one or two years later by peaks in the lynx population. Conversely, when hare numbers are low, fewer mature lynxes produce offspring and adult mortality is relatively high, leading to a decline in lynx numbers (1) (3) (4) (5) (6). In the southern parts of its range, the Canada lynx is less reliant on the snowshoe hare and takes a much greater diversity of prey, including rodents, birds, fish and deer (1) (5). Hunting mainly by sight, the lynx will stalk prey to within a few close bounds, or alternatively will lie in ambush for several hours on end (5). Although primarily **nocturnal**, it is sometimes seen moving about during the day (3). For shelter, it usually makes a rough bed under a tangle of fallen trees, a rock ledge or a shrub (3) (5).

The Canada lynx is a solitary species with mother and offspring groups being the only prolonged associations (3) (5) (8). The average home range is highly variable, ranging from 3 to 783 square kilometres, but most are between 15 and 50 square kilometres (1) (2). Territories range from a complete overlap between lynx of the same sex to exclusive ranges for males and females (3). During the breeding season, which typically lasts from March until April, there is an increase in vocalisations and scent marking with urine (3) (5). Mating is followed by a **gestation** period of 63 to 64 days, after which the female gives birth to a litter of one to eight young, with litter sizes corresponding closely with food availability (3) (5) (6). When prey is abundant, females can reach reproductive maturity at around 10 months, but, in times of scarcity, may only mature at around two years of age (3) (4). Males do not obtain sexual maturity until they are two or three years of age (2).

## THREATS

Throughout much of its range, the Canada lynx population remains widespread, abundant and largely stable. However, the status of populations in eastern Canada and the contiguous United States is less favourable. In eastern Canada, the lynx is struggling to compete with the eastern coyote, which has expanded its range over the last few decades, while in the southern parts of its range in the United States, it is mainly threatened by habitat fragmentation and alteration, accidental mortality, and increased competition with other predators (1).

## CONSERVATION

In Canada and Alaska, the trapping of Canada lynx is managed for the fur trade through various mechanisms, including closed seasons, quotas and trapping concessions. In the contiguous United States, the Canada lynx is listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act, which prohibits hunting or trapping of this species (1) (3). Furthermore, it also requires that the US government develop a recovery plan and identify areas of critical habitat for the lynx (1). A total of 204 Canada lynx were relocated to the southern Rocky Mountains of Colorado, and this population has become self sustaining. Critical habitat has been proposed for designation in Maine, Minnesota, Washington and the northern Rocky Mountains (2).

## FIND OUT MORE

Find out more about the Canada lynx and its conservation:

- IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group:  
<http://www.catsg.org>
- 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

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## GLOSSARY

- **Gestation:** The state of being pregnant; the period from conception to birth.
- **Nocturnal:** Active at night.

## REFERENCES

1. IUCN Red List (September, 2009)  
<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>
2. Bumstead, P. (January, 2011) *Pers. comm.*
3. Sunquist, M. and Sunquist, F. (2002) *Wild Cats of the World*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
4. Smithsonian National Zoological Park: Felid TAG - Canada lynx (September, 2009)  
<http://nationalzoo.si.edu/ConservationAndScience/AZA/FelidTAG/Species/Factsheets/Canada-lynx.cfm>
5. Nowak, R.M. (1999) *Walker's Mammals of the World*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland.
6. IUCN/SSC Cat Specialist Group (September, 2009)  
[http://www.catsg.org/catsgportal/cat-website/20\\_cat-website/home/index\\_en.htm](http://www.catsg.org/catsgportal/cat-website/20_cat-website/home/index_en.htm)
7. Macdonald, D.W. (2006) *The Encyclopedia of Mammals*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

8. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History - Canada lynx (September, 2009)  
[http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image\\_info.cfm?species\\_id=143](http://www.mnh.si.edu/mna/image_info.cfm?species_id=143)