



Bobcat

Felis rufus

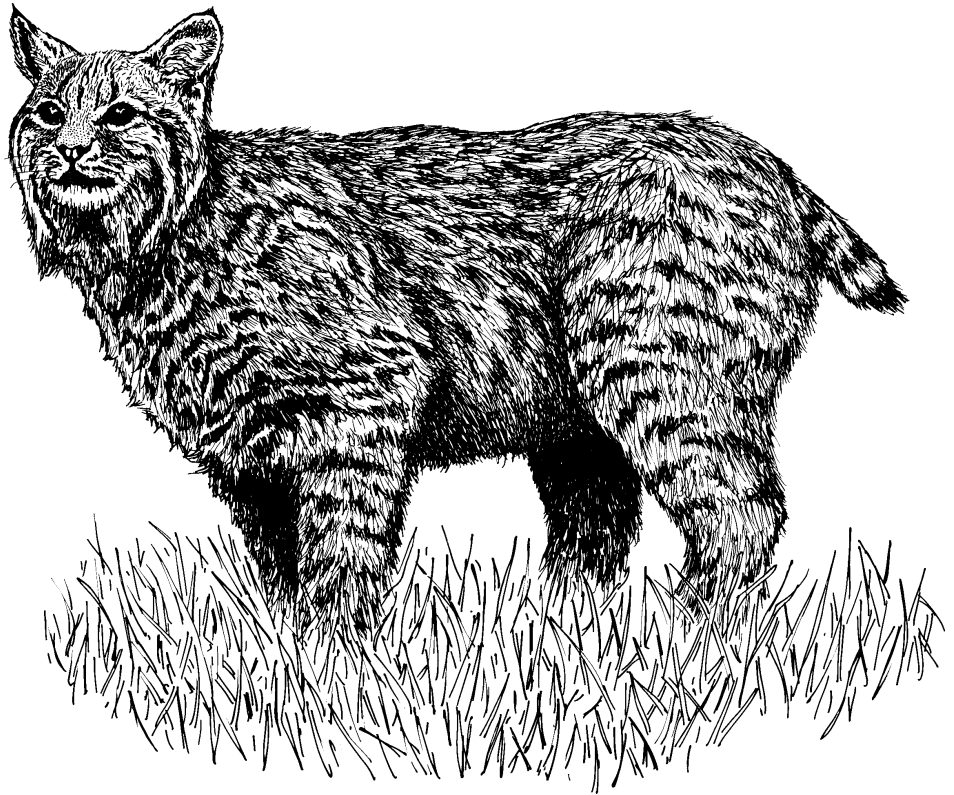
Early settlers were fascinated with the bobcat (sometimes called wildcat) and especially with its elusive, solitary and wily habits. Many stories about its powers arose from this time. Settlers called the bobcat “ol’ spitfire,” “lightning” and “woods ghost,” among other names. Some even believed various parts of its body possessed special healing powers.

These and other superstitions circulated by the early settlers in America were born out of inspiration, fear and awe of the bobcat. The bobcat’s secretive nature, its cunning and its toughness continue to fascinate people today.

History and Status

Throughout the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, bobcats were thought to be a threat to livestock and game animals. During that period bounties were widespread in the United States and bobcat pelts were worth little in the fur industry. During the 1970s, when large spotted cats became protected by the U.S. Endangered Species Act and The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the value of bobcat pelts dramatically increased.

Bobcats are currently managed by state wildlife departments and the export of their pelts out of the country is monitored and controlled by the federal government. Bobcat populations in both the United States and North Carolina, with the exception of heavily farmed and densely populated areas, appear to be stable.



Description

The bobcat gets its name from its short tail (about 5 inches long) that is dark above and white below, coloring that may serve a signaling function. The bobcat’s fur is short, dense and soft and is light brown to reddish brown on the back. The underside and insides of the legs are white with dark spots or bars. The fur down the middle of the back may be darker, and bobcats may be grayer in the winter than at other times of the year. Adult bobcats are about two times as large as a domestic cat, standing 20 inches to 30 inches at the shoulder. Adult weights range from 10 to 40 pounds, with males being about one third larger than females.

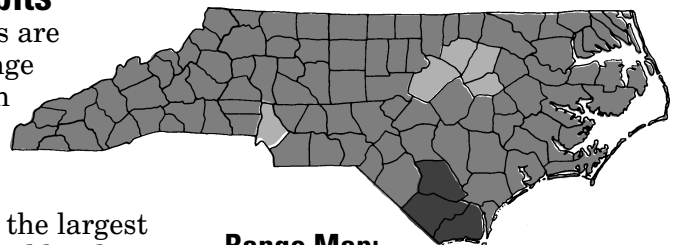
Habitat and Habits

Although bobcats are found in a wide range of habitats in North Carolina, wooded habitats of the Coastal Plain and mountains support the largest numbers. Bottomland hardwoods, young pine stands,

swamps and pocosins provide good bobcat habitation in eastern North Carolina. In the mountains, mature forests with openings or early successional forests nearby are favored. Hollow trees, rock piles, brush piles, root masses of uprooted trees or similar sites are common bobcat dens.

The bobcat is a carnivore that favors early successional prey such as rabbits and mice. Bobcats are excellent runners and climbers and are also very adept at swimming. Their paws have four toes apiece, each with retractable claws that are razor sharp. They also have long, sharp canine teeth adapted for seizing prey.

In addition to these hunting tools, the bobcat has excellent vision and hearing and also a



Range Map:

High ■ Moderate ■ Low ■

very good sense of smell. The thin pupil in the bobcat's eye expands and becomes large and round in darkness, an advantage for a night-hunting species. Tufts of hair that extend beyond the ears may assist the animal in pinpointing the faint sounds of small prey.

Dusk and dawn are the bobcat's most active periods of the day. This is probably because the animals they prey on—rabbits and medium-sized rodents (cotton rats) in North Carolina—are most active during these periods. Other animals they eat include squirrels, opossums, birds, snakes and deer.

Breeding usually occurs during February or March but bobcats can breed during other months of the year. Most kittens are born during May. Two to four kittens per litter will usually be born in hollow trees or logs, rock dens or brush piles.

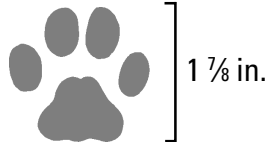
Range and Distribution

Bobcats are territorial and have large home ranges. The size of a bobcat's home range depends on habitat quality and the bobcat's sex and age. Home ranges may cover a half mile to 30 square miles with male ranges being two to five times larger than female ranges.

Although bobcats were historically found in all the lower 48 continental United States, bobcats are no longer found in the heavily populated areas of the mid-Atlantic coast or the heavily farmed areas of the Midwestern states. In North Carolina, the bobcat can be found in all portions of the state with the exception of the densely populated Piedmont.

People Interactions

Bobcats will live close to people when suitable habitat is available, but their secretive ways often let them go undetected. In North Carolina, between 100 to 1,000 bobcats have been harvested by hunters and trappers annually since 1960.



References

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Credits

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WILD Facts

BOBCAT

Classification

Class: Mammalia

Order: Carnivora

Average Size

Length: 24-40 in. including tail

Weight (U.S.): 10-40 lbs.

Weight (N.C.): 10-25 lbs. with males about one third larger than females.

Food

Rabbits, many different species of birds, cotton rats, white-tailed deer, rodents, gray squirrels, raccoons, opossums and snakes. Bobcats will also occasionally take farm animals.

Breeding

Sexually mature in 1-2 years. Mating usually takes place in late winter or early spring, but bobcats can mate any time during the year.

Young

Called kittens. Gestation period about 62 days. Average litter size is 2-4 kittens. Weight at birth is from 10-12 ounces. Bobcats normally produce one litter a year, but two are possible. Kittens are furred but blind at birth. Their eyes open in 3-10 days, and by 4 weeks they begin to explore the area around the den. They are weaned by 7-8 weeks of age.

Life Expectancy

Average 3-4 years for males and 4-5 years for females. Few live longer than 10 years.