



Living with Wildlife Bobcat

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is a medium-sized member of the North American wild cat family. Although bobcats are one of two members of the lynx family found in North America (the other member being the common lynx), only the bobcat occurs in California. They are found throughout most of California, yet typically go unseen due to their quiet and solitary ways. However, bobcat sightings are increasing as they appear to be using urban and suburban settings more often.

APPEARANCE

- Adult bobcats weigh an average of 17-25 pounds.
- A bobcat's tail is "bobbed" in appearance (4 to 6") with a black tip of the tail
- Bobcats have a round face and pointed ears.
- Fur can be shades of tan and brown, with dark brown to black stripes and spots on parts of the body.
- Backs of the ears and ear tufts are black.
- Longer fur on side of the head gives the appearance of "sideburns".

Bobcats are often confused with other cat species during sightings. If you know what physical traits to look for, you can easily distinguish between species:

- Bobcats are one-quarter the size of an adult mountain lion and two to three times larger than a domestic cat.
- A bobcat's tail is much shorter than the tail of a mountain lion or most domestic cats.

BEHAVIOR AND ECOLOGY

Habitat and Home Range

- Rock cliffs, outcroppings, and ledges are important to bobcats for shelter, raising young, and resting sites. Optimal habitat are brushy stages of low and mid-elevation conifer, oak, riparian, and pinyon-juniper forests, and all stages of chaparral.
- Large brush or log piles and hollow trees or logs can be used as cover in wooded areas.
- Bobcats may also be active in open fields, meadows, and agricultural areas with nearby brush for cover.
- Bobcats are less frequently seen in areas with heavy winter snow. Deep snow greatly reduces their mobility and ability to catch prey.
- Home range size can vary with the quality of habitat. In habitats where more food is available, smaller home range sizes can result. Average home range varies between 1.8 – 20.7 square miles. Females occupy smaller range sizes.

Reproduction and Family Structure

- Bobcats are solitary animals. Males and females only associate briefly for courtship and mating.
- A litter of 2 to 4 kittens is typically born between April and July in dens found in caves, rock crevices, or hollow logs or trees. The den is carefully lined with dry leaves, moss or grass formed into a shallow depression.
- Young bobcats disperse at about 8 months old.



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Food and Feeding Habits

- Bobcats are carnivorous but can have a diverse diet, including vegetation, grasses, and berries.
- Prey includes mice, voles, rabbits, gophers, birds, amphibians, reptiles, insects, as well as deer fawns.
- Domestic animals, including pets, small livestock, and poultry, can become prey if access is available.
- Bobcats hunt primarily by sight and sound. They spend lots of time sitting or crouching, watching, and listening. Once bobcats locate prey, they stalk within short range and then pounce.
- A bobcat will cover the remains of a kill with debris such as grass, twigs, snow, or leaves. The bobcat will revisit a carcass until most of it is consumed.

Mortality and Longevity

- In the wild, bobcats may live up to 10 years with an average life expectancy of 3 to 4 years. In captivity they may live up to 25 years.
- Few predators can kill an adult bobcat, other than cougars and humans. Adult bobcats may receive fatal or debilitating injuries from other bobcats or prey animals.
- Young bobcats are killed by eagles, great horned owls, coyotes, foxes, bears, and adult male bobcats.

VIEWING BOBCATS

Because of their solitary nature and caution towards humans, bobcats are seldom seen. They may be active day or night, but often avoid daylight activity. In developed areas near humans, bobcats typically limit their activity to early dawn, dusk, and night hours.

Bobcats typically stay within an established territory and move between resting areas, food sources, or hunting areas. Evidence of a bobcat's presence may include tracks in snow or mud, droppings (scat), feeding areas, and claw marks on tree trunks.

Feeding areas (caches)

A bobcat will eat the carcass of a large mammal. Like a mountain lion, it will cover the carcass remains and frequently return to feed on it. A bobcat can only reach out 15 inches to rake up debris to cover the food cache. These marks, and the bobcat's much smaller tracks, help distinguish between bobcat and lion caches.

Droppings (Scat)

Bobcats, like most cats, generally cover their scat. They will use loose soil, snow, leaves or other material. When visible, their scat can be large and tubular with blunt ends like the feces of other cats and some dogs.

Tracks

The bobcat track is easily distinguished with a round shape, four toes and, unlike those left by members of the dog family, has no claws evident. Bobcat tracks are similar to mountain lion tracks, but only about two inches in diameter, or roughly twice the size of a domestic cat's print. Bobcat tracks may be mistaken for a coyote or dog.



Scratching posts

Like house cats scratching furniture, bobcats mark their territory boundaries by leaving claw marks on trees, stumps and occasionally fence posts. Bobcat claw marks are normally 2 to 3 feet above the ground; domestic cat scratching occurs at a height of about 1-1/2 to 2 feet.

Calls

Bobcats rarely vocalize, although they often yowl and hiss during the mating season, especially when adult males compete for the same receptive female.

LEGAL STATUS

In California, bobcats are classified as nongame animals. Effective November 2015, recreational and commercial trapping of bobcats is no longer allowed. Effective January 2020, all hunting or take of bobcat is no longer allowed in California. These same regulations also established bobcat as a species that can be taken under the authority of a depredation permit.

- A property owner or an authorized agent under the permit may take a bobcat on the property if it is harming domestic animals.
- A bobcat may be taken in defense of self or another person. A person taking such action must have reasonable belief that a bobcat poses threat of imminent serious physical harm and must obtain a depredation permit.
- Any bobcat taken under direct authority of a permit or for the protection of a person, remains the property of the state, must be reported immediately, and provided to the CDFW upon request.



PREVENTING CONFLICTS

Bobcats are sometimes responsible for losses of poultry, lambs, small goats, pigs, and pets such as small dogs and cats. Once a bobcat does damage for the first time, it is likely that it will repeat the behavior. You can use the following management strategies to reduce conflicts.

- **Do not feed wildlife.** This includes deer, raccoons, and other small mammals. Predators follow prey. Bobcats can also be attracted to the many birds and rodents that visit bird feeders. Prevent the buildup of seeds and organic debris that can collect under bird feeders.
- **Feed dogs and cats indoors and clean up after them.** If you must feed pets outside, do so during daylight hours. Collect food and water bowls, leftovers, and any spilled food as soon as pets have finished eating. Water, pet food and pet droppings can attract other wildlife, including bobcats.
- **Keep unattended dogs and cats indoors, especially from dusk to dawn.** Left outside at night, smaller dogs and domestic cats may become prey for bobcats.
- **Keep small pets and poultry (e.g., chickens, ducks, turkeys) in a secure outdoor enclosure during the day.** Use woven wire or electrified “hot wire” fencing (Figure 1). Bobcats can climb wooden fence post and jump fences 6 feet or more in height. Install two electrified wires, 12 and 18 inches above ground and onto existing fence posts, poultry pen supports, and other structures using the proper insulators. A single strand of wire may be sufficient, but two wires is best.
- **Keep small pets and poultry in secure outdoor pens at night.** Be sure any outdoor pen includes a sturdy top. To prevent access to birds (night roost), equip poultry houses with fitted doors. Completely enclose outdoor pens with 1-inch chicken wire placed over a sturdy wood framework. Securely wire all seams to prevent bobcats from using their weight and claws to gain access. Anchor wire at the bottom to prevent it from being pulled out of the ground.
- **Keep small livestock and outdoor pets confined in secure pens during periods of vulnerability from dusk to dawn.** (Temporary or portable fencing keeps livestock together so they can be guarded more effectively.) During birthing season, keep young and vulnerable animals confined at all times. Avoid using remote pastures or holding areas. Remove and secure sick or injured animals immediately.
- **Use scare devices to temporarily frighten bobcat from attractants.** Scare devices such as motion sensor lights, motion detectors that make loud

sounds when triggered or radios, may also deter bobcats--until they lose their fear of the device when it becomes clear the devices pose no true threat.

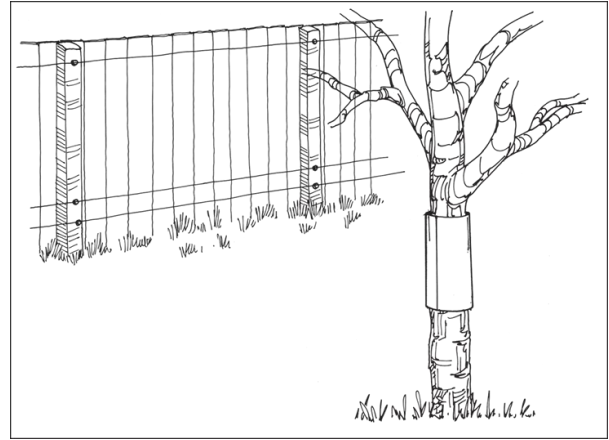


Figure 1. Run one or two electrified wires towards the top of the fence to prevent bobcats from jumping the lower hot wires and making the climb. (Credit: Jenifer Rees.)

Repellents, Fumigants, and Toxicants

No chemical repellents, fumigants or toxicants are currently registered for bobcats.

Trap and Relocation

Trapping and relocating wildlife causing property damage may seem like an ideal solution. However, it is not an option in California. Bobcats causing property damage may be trapped under the authority of a depredation permit but must be killed or released immediately. They may not be relocated to a different area and released.

ENCOUNTERING A BOBCAT

CDFW receives numerous reports of bobcat sightings each year. A sighting alone usually does not lead to conflict. CDFW can provide technical assistance, education, and outreach. CDFW may also respond to collect a sick, injured, or orphaned bobcat.

- Report wildlife incidents or sightings online to the Wildlife Incident Reporting System:
apps.wildlife.ca.gov/wir
- Report sick or injured bobcat to the CDFW Dispatch (24-hours):
Northern California: 916-358-1312
Southern California: 951-443-2944
- Visit the CDFW website for more information at <https://wildlife.ca.gov>