



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. Bobcats can be distinguished at a distance by their short “bobbed” tail (4”- 6”), round face and pointed ears. 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. Adult bobcats weigh an average of 17-25 pounds. Bobcats can be various shades of tan and brown, with dark brown to black stripes, and spots on some parts of the body. The tip of the tail and backs of the ears are black. They have short ear tufts and longer fur on the side of their head, giving 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 make the distinction between species: Bobcats are only one-quarter to less than one-half the size of a mountain lion. They are generally two to three times larger than a domestic housecat and have an

overall larger body structure.

The bobcat’s tale is “bobbed” in appearance (4 to 6”) and much shorter than the tail of mountain lions and most domestic cats.

BOBCAT 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 brushstages 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 where brush or wooded areas for cover are nearby.
- 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 quality of the habitat and food supply. 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.



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Food and Feeding Habits

- Bobcats are largely carnivorous but will consume a wide variety of food sources, even some vegetation such as fruits and grasses.
- Food sources include: mice, voles, rabbits, gophers, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and insects. Diet can include deer (mostly young fawns).
- Domestic animals can become bobcat prey if left unsecured at night, including domestic cats, small dogs, poultry, piglets, small goats, and lambs.
- 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.

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 when they are about 8 months old.

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.

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 are only about two inches in diameter, making them roughly twice the size of a domestic cat's print. The bobcat track loosely resembles that of a coyote or dog but is more rounded.



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 dog species.

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.

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.



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 on your property to prevent or 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 other 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 small mammals and 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.

Enclose pet birds and poultry (chickens, ducks, and turkeys) in a secure outdoor pen and house. Bobcats will eat domestic birds if they can access them. Be sure the outdoor pen includes a sturdy top. To prevent bobcats from accessing birds in their night roosts, equip poultry houses with well-fitted doors.

To deter bobcats during the day, completely enclose outdoor pens with 1-inch chicken wire placed over a sturdy wood framework. Overlap and securely wire all seams on top to prevent bobcats from using their weight and claws to gain access. The bottom of the chicken wire should be well anchored to prevent it from being pulled out of the ground.

Bobcats can climb, so wooden fence posts or structures that provide footing and access to an unprotected pen is not effective. Bobcats also have the ability to jump fences 6 feet or more in height. Use woven wire over head or an electrified "hot wire" to prevent access.

Keep livestock and small animals that live outdoors confined in secure pens during periods of vulnerability. All animals should be confined from

dusk to dawn. (Temporary or portable fencing keeps livestock together so that 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.

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.

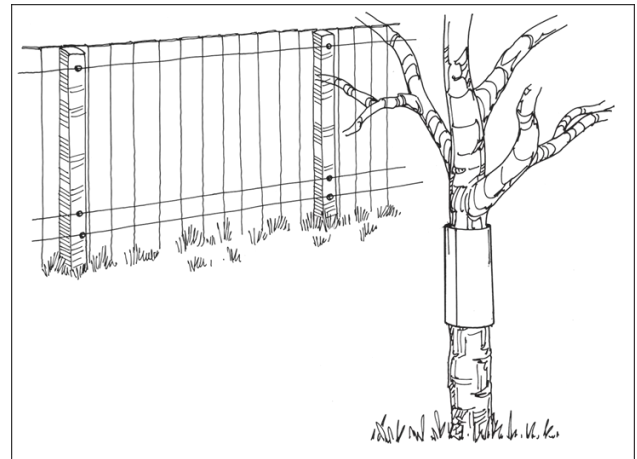


Figure 4 Install two electrified wires, 12 and 18 inches above ground and onto existing fence posts, poultry pen supports, and other structures using the proper insulators. A single strand of wire may be sufficient, but two wires will provide added insurance against the animal making the climb. Run one or two electrified wires towards the top of the fence to prevent bobcats from jumping the lower hot wires and making the climb. (Drawings by Jenifer Rees.)

Repellents, Fumigants, and Toxicants

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

Translocation

Trapping and relocating wildlife causing property damage may seem like a good idea and an ideal solution. However, this is not a legal option. Bobcats preying upon pets and livestock may be trapped but only under the authority of a depredation permit (www.wildlife.ca.gov/living-with-wildlife). However, they may not be relocated



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to a different area and released (they must be released on site or euthanized immediately). Aside from not being a legal option, it is not a sustainable solution. Bobcats often return to their original territories after being relocated – putting them at risk for vehicle strikes while crossing highways and busy roads while making their way back.

Food attractants (food, water, den site and cover) or access to attractants must be eliminated to get to the root of the problem. When possible, coexisting with wildlife is the more sustainable option.

Technical Assistance

California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) receives numerous reports of bobcat sightings each year. A sighting alone usually does not require a response by CDFW. However, CDFW can provide technical assistance, education, and outreach.

CDFW may also respond to collect a sick (disease monitoring), injured or orphaned bobcat.

LEGAL STATUS

In California, bobcats are classified as nongame animals and it is illegal to hunt, trap or otherwise take a bobcat. Effective November 2015, recreational and commercial trapping of bobcats is no longer allowed, and 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. The body of any bobcat taken under direct authority of a depredation permit or for the protection of a person, remains the property of the state and must be reported and provided to CDFW immediately.

ENCOUNTERING A BOBCAT

- Report wildlife sightings or incidents online using the Wildlife Incident Reporting System
<http://apps.wildlife.ca.gov/wir>
- Report a sick or injured bobcat to CDFW through the 24-hour dispatch numbers:

In Northern California use: 916-358-1312

In Southern California use 951-443-2944

For more information contact CDFW at wildlife.ca.gov

Special Thanks to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Living With Bobcats brochure for serving as a model served as a model for this document.

