

Bobcat

(*Lynx rufus*)

Kingdom: *Animalia*

Phylum: *Chordata*

Class: *Mammalia*

Order: *Carnivora*

Family: *Felidae*



DESCRIPTION:

Shoulder height: 19-22"; weight: 12-26 pounds. Often confused with lynx, but with these differences: the bobcat has a longer tail with a black bar on the upper side fringed with white hairs; it also has shorter and more slender legs with small, less thickly furred paws and ear tufts less visible. Usual color is a shade of buff or brown spotted with dark brown and black. Buff bobcats are common in desert country; those from forests are darker. Females have 4 nipples.

GEOGRAPHICAL RANGE AND HABITAT:

Southern Canada, the entire United States (except the midwestern corn belt) and southward into Mexico. Prefers brushy woodlands but occurs sparingly from high mountains to desert. Common in California chaparral communities.

LIFE CYCLE/SOCIAL STRUCTURE:

Solitary, except during breeding season. Nocturnal where hunted, but often abroad during day in protected areas. Territories are not defended but are vigorously marked (especially by females) with feces, urine, anal gland secretions, ground scrapes and "scratching post" scrapes. Females maintain exclusive ranges, but male ranges may overlap and include those of several females. Females den in a cave, hollow log or stump. Annual litter of 2 or 3 young. Most kittens are born small, blind, and helpless in April or May after a gestation period of 60-70 days. The mother defends them, keeping the father away until the kittens are weaned at about two months. (Other large carnivores may also prey on young bobcats.) The male may then reappear to help the female collect food. (Doubtful.) Litter disbands in

about six to nine months. Life span in wild 12+ years, in captivity up to 30 years.

DIET:

Diet varied but strictly carnivorous: rabbits, squirrels, mice, gophers, wood rats, chipmunks, as well as the eggs of ground-nesting birds and occasionally a lamb or young deer. The Zoo feeds commercial "Feline Diet": fortified meat and supplements.

SPECIAL ADAPTATIONS:

Expert climbers and swimmers. Excellent hunters, having keen eyesight, but short-winded and unable to sustain an extended chase. The decorative-looking hairs on the ear tips serve as antennae, increasing the animal's ability to hear the slightest sound. If these tufts are removed, hearing declines. Bobcats have prominent ear spots which play an important part in aggressive posturing, possibly serving as eye mimics to give an impression of a wide and formidable head.

MORE INFORMATION:

The bobcat probably gets its name from the short tail and its lolling gait. It is estimated that there is about one animal for every 1 to 2 square miles of chaparral, but they are rarely seen because of their remarkable protective coloration.