

# BOBCAT

The bobcat is found only in North America. Although an adult male can weigh up to 30 pounds, it is the smallest of our native wildcats. It is also the most numerous. Bobcats can be found in every type habitat from the desert to the mountains. They generally avoid open country preferring terrain with plenty of cover.

Generally the bobcat is nocturnal but it is sometimes seen in the early morning or late evening. It likes to sleep the day away comfortably perched on the branch of a tree or curled up in the underbrush.

Except during the breeding season, bobcats are solitary animals; each establishes a hunting territory and marks it by urinating at "scent posts" on the borders. The territory of a male may sometimes overlap with those of one or two females but they are careful to keep out of each other's way. Bobcats like to keep to the same hunting trails every night. They feed mainly on small mammals, rodents and birds but may attack an injured deer. Small prey is eaten straight away, the remains of larger prey is cached and eaten later.

A bobcat has very good hearing (the ear tufts increase its sensitivity to sound) and very good eyesight. A special reflecting layer in the eye enables it to see in much lower light levels than we can so that night hunting is no problem.

The name, bobcat, comes from the animal's short, bobbed tail. This is black on the top but white underneath. A mother bobcat, out on a training expedition with her three month old kittens tagging along behind, will raise her tail in a curve. The white underside of the tail is clearly visible as a "follow me" signal to the youngsters.

The sounds the bobcat makes are similar to those of a housecat, but during the mating season, in early spring, a few may group together and give out piercing shrieks and wails. Anyone hearing them is almost bound to think that, at the very least, a mountain lion is around.

The young are born in late April or early May in a leaf lined den in a hollow log or crevice in the rocks. The male takes no part in rearing the babies, the mother brings home small animals and birds until the kittens are old enough to go hunting with her. At about seven months the kittens may go on foraging trips by themselves but return afterwards to the safety of the family and the den. They leave for good when they are between nine and twelve months of age and establish their own hunting territories.

Bobcat (*Felis rufus*)

