

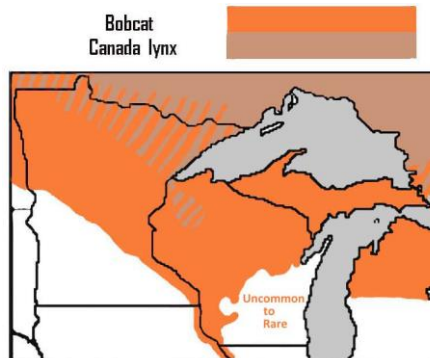
Wisconsin Wildlife *Fast Facts*

Compiled from various sources by Christian W. Cold, WDNR Ladysmith

Anyone, who has raised cats and dogs, will attest to the stark differences in their personalities. Dogs are social – they have comrades. Cats are solitary – they have clients. Cats reveal their clandestine nature in the covert manner in-which they conduct daily business. Ever watchful, they will detect your approach, quietly rouse, and retreat without ever being seen. To observe a wildcat is an achievement! Consider yourself the fortunate recipient of a cat's momentary carelessness... a rare lapse in vigilance. Most folks will never witness these phantoms amongst us.....

The Wild Cats

The bobcat and Canada Lynx



Bobcat



lynx



Bobcat *Lynx rufus*

Vernaculars: wildcat, bay lynx, catamount, lynx cat, red lynx, bob-tailed cat, bizhiw ("bishew" - Chippewa).

Description:

At first glance, a huge tabby or tiger house cat (2X size) with a short tail and distinct cheek sideburns.

Body is short. The upper parts are rusty-brown or grayish with discrete dark spots, blotches or streaks.

Summer coat often has a slight rufus tone.

Undersides are whitish.

Ears are conspicuous, with small ear tufts and distinct white spot on back.

Feet are not (conspicuously) large.

Tail is approx. $\frac{1}{4}$ the length of body, with white underside extending to the tip.

Length: 32-40", Weight: 15-40 lbs. Mature male is larger (10%) & heavier (30%) than the female.

A mature male bobcat may be much heavier than a mature male lynx.

Voice is similar to domestic cat, but louder and shriller.

Twelve recognized subspecies.

Range:

Primarily continental U.S. and extreme southern Canada (coast to coast).

Also south through most of Mexico.

Lives in practically every state but Delaware.

Absent (extirpated) in most of the Ohio Valley, Upper Mississippi Valley and southern Great Lakes.

A recent immigrant to southern Canada.

Also occurs in mountainous region of British Columbia.

Status:

North American population estimate has varied from approx. 750,000 to 1.5 million animals. Current (2009) N.A continental estimate is 1.4 to 2.6 million bobcats.

In WI relatively common in northern forests (est. 3000) north of latitude 45' N.

Especially common in block from Sawyer Co. east to Marinette Co.
Occasionally seen in central & south WI – esp. along the floodplains of the Wisconsin & Mississippi Rivers.
Rare to absent in south central and southeast WI.
Endangered in Ohio, Indiana and New Jersey.
Threatened in Iowa and Illinois.

WI History:

From **1864 until 1970** bobcats were unprotected in Wisconsin.
As lands were cleared for farms, bobcat range retreated to the north.
A state bounty of \$5.00 was paid **until 1964** (some counties continued **until 1971**).
Since 1950, bobcats probably benefited considerably from the increase in cutting of aspen (which improved snowshoe hare habitat).
In the **1970's** world markets for spotted cats increased pelt values tenfold, making it necessary for tight restrictions to be implemented, which would hold Wisconsin harvest to approx. 200 animals annually.
A 5 ½ month open season was established in **1970** (reduced to 4 ½ mo. in **1971**).
Carcass registration (inspect and tag) was initiated in **1973**.
Wisconsin season (**2009**) Oct 17 through Dec. 31st.

Origins:

Initial ancestral (cat) appears to have been a small (house cat-sized) arboreal, meat-eating specialist in Northern Hemisphere forests of the late Cretaceous/Early Eocene epochs (approx. 60 – 80 MYA).
These little carnivorans had evolved the *trademark* single pair of meat-cutting teeth (carnassials) on the 4th upper premolar and lower 1st molar.
Approx. 40 MYA they diverged into two sister groups – the Feliformia and Caniformia.
Approx. 37 MYA until 23 MYA (Oligocene) there existed several bizarre groups or “clades” (group having common ancestor) of cats, cat-like hyenas, hyena-like cats, bear-like dogs, dog-like bears, and bear-like hyenas (taxonomist’s nightmare).
At approx. 35 MYA cats and hyenas split off to form their own distinct clades.
The “dawn cat” *Proailurus* appears in Europe approx. 34 MYA.
Approx. 23MYA until 17MYA (mid- Miocene) cats became so rare in the fossil record that paleontologists refer to the period as “the great cat gap”.
Cats abruptly reappear in the fossil beds at 16-17 MYA .
Descendents of *Proailurus* emigrated out of Eurasia and entered North America (via Beringia) shortly afterwards.

For the remainder of the Miocene “true cats” continued to increase, diversify and displace older, archaic forms.

As forests became edge, then savannah, then shrub grasslands and prairies, isolated cats continued to diversify (develop specializations) for the new habitats.

The genus *Lynx* shared a clade with the Puma, Leopard Cat (*Prionailurus*), and Domestic Cat (*Felis*) lineages, dated to 7.15 MYA ; *Lynx* diverged first, approximately 3.24 MYA.

The bobcat is believed to have evolved from the Eurasian Lynx, which crossed into North America via Beringia during the Pleistocene as early as 2.6 MYA. The first wave moved into the southern portion of the continent, which was soon cut off from the north by advancing glaciers. This isolated population evolved into modern bobcats around 20,000 years ago. A second population arrived from Asia and settled in the north, developing into modern Canada Lynx.

Habitat:

Inhabits wilder portions of forests, brushlands and semi-open habitat (but may be found near urban and agricultural areas too).

Especially fond of swamps (spruce, cedar, balsam fir & alder).

Areas with exposed rock outcrops, boulders, deadfalls (heavy structure) are favored.

More of a habitat generalist than the lynx.

From humid sub-tropical swamps to arid deserts and mountains

Populations & home range:

In suitable habitat a (crude) density of one cat/10-15 square miles may be expected.

Abundance appears to be strongly correlated with the distribution of cedar, spruce-fir and alder swamps.

Male home range average of 25 square miles. Female average approx. 15 square mi.

Male home ranges may overlap.

Established females are intolerant of other female trespassers.

Habits:

Opportunistic but almost wholly carnivorous.

Dislikes and usually avoids “tainted” meat.

Sometimes gorges – then fasts for several days.

Primarily nocturnal, but sometimes active during day (esp. during winter).

Reclusive, solitary (hunts alone) and retiring (seldom seen).

Watchful and alert (but does not post itself as a sentinel).

Slinks away quietly when approached.

Travels in a “stealthy walk” or sometimes trots.

Dislikes water but can swim relatively well.

When crossing a stream, it will go out-of-it’s-way to find a log crossing- rather than wade through a couple inches of water.

Movements:

Males move approx. 2.6 miles/ week. Females move approx. 1.6 miles/week.

Juveniles may disperse over 100 miles before establishing their own territory.

Transients often travel through established territories (avoiding heavy use areas).

Logging roads, trails, and railroad grades are often used (esp. during winter).

Communication:

Generally, a quiet animal (except during breeding season).

Voice is similar to domestic cat but louder and shriller.

Territory boundaries are maintained by placement of feces, urine, and glandular secretions.

Special adaptations and limitations:

Vision is exceptional - day or night (but not total darkness).

Acute visual sensitivity for detection of movements.

Hearing is also acute.

Sense of smell good (but not exceptional).

Strongly muscled for explosive action – but endurance is poor.

Can leap a 12 foot vertical span. Can jump (up) 8 feet.

Not particularly fast – runs at 12-15 m.p.h. with a bounding gallop of 6’-8’ leaps.

Exceptional sense of balance.

Diet:

In Great lakes primarily snowshoe hares and cottontails, but this cat enjoys a much richer variety of prey choices than the lynx.

Mice, voles, shrews, squirrels, woodchucks, porcupines, herptiles and insects.

Deer figure high during late fall & winter (cat depresses windpipe).

A 20 lb. cat has been known to kill a 200 lb. deer.

Deer fawns & ground-nesting birds often figure high in the spring.

Reproduction:

Both sexes are sexually mature at 2 years.

Polygamous. Male plays no parental role.

Breeds from late January (Feb in north) to early March.

Gestation is 50 - 62 days.

One to four kittens (usually 2-3) born in May with eyes closed (open at 9-10 days).

Kittens begin to eat (some) meat at 1 month.

Young are weaned at 2 months and begin to leave mother at 6 months.

Mortality, parasites & disease:

Rabies, tularemia, feline panleukopenia, and leptospirosis.

Parasites include ticks, mites, fleas, *toxoplasma gondii*, and most parasites associated with their mammalian prey (esp. rabbits and squirrels).

Bobcats have few predators – young may be vulnerable to wolves, coyotes, eagles, horned owls, fishers and adult male bobcats.

Lifespan:

Approx. 8 to 15 years in the wild.

Record of 16 years in the wild and 32 years in captivity.

Conservation status and management:

Wisconsin goal is to maintain a population of 3000 to 5000 bobcats.

The bobcat is managed as a trophy animal with a 2-2 ½ month season.

Approx. 200 Wisconsin bobcats are harvested, tagged and registered annually.

Methods of take include hound hunting, trapping and (occasionally) calling.

Trappers prefer dry weather with above freezing temperatures.

Houndsmen prefer moderate snow cover for good tracking.

The future outlook is good, with the exception of areas – where cedar is failing to regenerate (due to excessive browsing).

Continued research is needed in order to refine current management strategies and ensure a widely-distributed and sustainable population in Wisconsin.

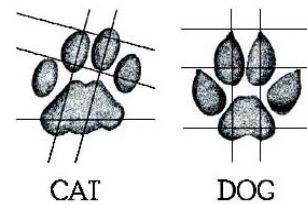
Damage and abatement:

Although known to occasionally take poultry and livestock (esp. sheep & goats), reports of problems with bobcats are rare in Wisconsin.

Tracks, sign and trapping:

Cats make an obvious effort to bury their scat and hide or cache excess food.

Unlike dogs, cat tracks are not symmetrical.....



Trapping methods include cubby and dirt-hole sets.

Traps include #1 $\frac{3}{4}$ - #3 foothold, or #220 body-grip.

Lures include commercial gland, beaver castor, skunk essence, catnip & fish oils.

Cat is much-more reliant on sight than scent, therefore use of a visual "flag" (bird wing or strip of fur) is most effective. (**The placement of any exposed animal part or sight lure is limited to a minimum distance of 25 feet from the trap in Wisconsin.**)

Pelt - Although the leather is strong, the fur is often brittle and perishable.

The pelt is prime (the winter coat is fully in and hair follicles are completely mature) from mid-December through early March, however color and hair quality is actually best just-before full primness is achieved.

In Captivity:

Due to its pugnacious temperament, the bobcat is considered a poor choice for a pet.

"We made an attempt at domesticating one of the young of this species. Only two weeks old, it was a most spiteful, growling and snappish little wretch, and showed no disposition to improve its habits and manners under our kind tuition."

- John James Audubon

Others have described it as coldly aloof, plainly disagreeable, sullen, contemptuously tolerant and openly resentful.

A final word on bobcats:

The bobcat has so-successfully adapted to civilization that it has increased in number and extended its range. It is remarkable that a predator, which is capable of killing deer, has roused so little contempt from hunters in a state with a strong deer-hunting culture. This is probably due to the rarity of nuisance or damage complaints, the cat's mystique in the minds of sportsmen and its value as a rare and beautiful trophy.



Canada Lynx *Lynx Canadensis*

Vernaculars: gray wildcat, lynx

Description:

At first glance, a medium-large, smoky gray tabby cat with a gangly frame and wide mutton-chops of fur on its face.

The facial “ruff” is more conspicuous than with the bobcat.

Ear tufts much more pronounced than in bobcat.

Tail is (entirely) black-tipped.

Feet are disproportionately large (enormous) for a cat.

Length (with tail) of 30-40 inches.

Males weigh 25-35 lbs. Females weigh 15-20 lbs.

Three recognized subspecies in North America.

Range:

Distribution of lynx closely follows range of snowshoe hare – boreal forests of N.A.

Contiguous U.S. has limited suitable lynx habitat. [Critical Habitat for Canada Lynx Map](#)

Breeding populations exist in Canada, Alaska, Montana, Idaho, and to a limited extent in Washington, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine and Minnesota.

- In Minnesota, confined primarily to NE counties of Cook, Lake, St. Louis and extreme north Koochiching. [Critical Habitat Unit #2 Map](#)

Status:

Federally threatened in lower 48 states with approx. 300-700 animals.

A harvested furbearer in Canada and Alaska (population is unknown).

A state-threatened species in Minnesota (calculated at 190 to 250 animals in 2008).

A protected Special Concern species in Wisconsin (not tracked by WDNR-NHI).

Wisconsin is not recognized by USFWS as able to support a breeding population.

Origins: (See Bobcat Origins above)

History:

Wisconsin - From **1865 to 1957** a state-financed bounty was enacted.

By **early 1900's** lynx was thought to no-longer breed in state.

1972 – Placed on WI Endangered Species List.

1997 – Lynx is delisted in Wisconsin.

1998 - Lynx is listed as a “Protected Wild Animal” (see NR 10.02)

2000 – USFWS classifies all lynx south of Canada as Threatened Species.

2005 & 2006 – Reports of 10 lynx from 8 northern counties (ID debated).

2005 – A lynx/bobcat hybrid is found dead in Polk County.

Canada – Records of lynx harvested have been kept by the Hudson's Bay Company and Canadian Government since the **1730's**.

After 1930 populations remained low for approx. 25 yrs.

Population recovered by the **early 1960's** (prob. due to stricter quotas).

Low harvest since **1980's** reflected low fur prices (not low lynx numbers).

Habitat:

Shuns open areas - prefers dark, unbroken forests.

Mesic, coniferous (boreal) forests that have cold, snowy winters.

A mix of old growth & younger stands of trees with a thick understory, abundant downed woody debris, and rugged terrain with rocky outcrops.

Territory size:

2 ½ to 92 square miles (usually 7-35 square miles)

Density, cycles and population dynamics:

There is an approximate 10 year interval between population peaks in Canada.

Lynx population cycle lags behind hare cycle by 1-2 years.

Cycle peaks & crashes occur at roughly the same time across the entire range.

Habits:

An introvert....secretive, retiring, curious-but cautious & tentative.

Most active in early morning and at dusk.

Predisposed to roam extensively in search of hares.

Stations itself in a concealed spot along a well-used trail (like some spiders).

Tends to stay within 100 yards of trees.

Highly mobile with a propensity to disperse long distances.

Animals that disperse to unsuitable or marginal habitat eventually perish or rarely (if ever) establish themselves in such areas.

Special adaptations and limitations:

Vision is exceptional (6X better than ours) - day or night (but not total darkness).

Bulging corneas give better peripheral vision than ours.

Acute visual sensitivity for detection of movements.

Poor color detection.

Hearing is acute.

Long ear tufts and whiskers (24) are sensitive to touch, vibration & air currents.

Sense of smell is good (but not exceptional).

Strongly muscled for explosive action – but endurance is poor.

Thick, loose skin protects it during a fight.

Can leap a 15 foot vertical span.

Can jump (up) 8 feet.

Not particularly fast – runs at 12-15 m.p.h. with a bounding gallop of 6'-8' leaps.

May reach 30 mph in a short burst.

If it does not capture prey within the first 5 or 6 bounds, cat usually aborts the chase.

Exceptional sense of balance.

Diet:

Primarily snowshoe hares (average of 150-200 hares a year).

A minimum density of 1.2 hares/acre, distributed across a large landscape is needed to support a stable lynx population.

Also deer, young caribou, grouse, squirrels, muskrats & other rodents.

Summer diet much more varied than winter.

Hunts every 1-2 days and consumes average of 1 ½ lbs. at a meal.

May practice surplus killing when food is scarce.

In Newfoundland lynx switch to caribou following a hare population crash, then switch back to hares as they recover.

Reproduction:

While able to breed at 1 yr, usually doesn't do so until 2nd year.

Breeds in late January or February.

The female deposits urine where the male has marked his territory.

She then (shamelessly) begins to scream and holler until the male finds her.

She will mate with only one male each season.

The den is usually in a thicket of shrubs, on a slope, and face south or southwest.

One to five (average 4 / max 8) 12-13 oz. kits are born after 65-70-day gestation.

Kits are essentially blind until 8-10 days old.

They remain with mom for 9 months (dad takes no part in rearing the young).

Mom “encourages” the young to be independent in midwinter as the denning season approaches.

Mortality, parasites & disease:

Rabies, tularemia, feline panleukopenia, and leptospirosis.

Tapeworms, roundworms, hookworms, ticks and most parasites of mammalian prey.

Few predators – young may be vulnerable to wolves, wolverines, coyotes, horned owls and fishers.

Lifespan:

Average life expectancy in wild is 10 years or less, but may reach 15.

Research, conservation management & human dimensions:

As the snowshoe hare prefers forests 5 to 50 years after a fire event, policies & management to suppress fire may inadvertently suppress both hare & lynx populations.

Although able to exist in close proximity to human settlements, the lynx is highly-susceptible to hunting, trapping and being hit by cars.

Timber harvest and natural forest disturbance processes (fire, insect infestations, catastrophic winds, and disease outbreaks) can provide foraging habitat for lynx when the resulting stem densities and structure provides adequate forage & cover for snowshoe hare.

A final word:

In strict biological terms, the lynx is at the southern limit of its range at the Canada – U.S. border. At this boundary the cat is administratively separated as either a harvested furbearer or a fully protected species.

If the lynx is to survive in the contiguous United States, efforts must be directed at an interagency landscape level* with forest management practices which relate to snowshoe hare densities being a “significant” (and realistic) objective. This will not be an easy task as differences in vegetation, topography, and human land use result in potentially different management solutions. Aggressive management strategies may also be questioned in areas where the cat is considered a “peripheral” species at-best. Although hybridization between lynx and bobcat occasionally occurs, competitive exclusion by the pugnacious bobcat likely prevents any further southward expansion of lynx range.

* Preliminary cooperative interagency efforts (between Minnesota and Ontario) to address lynx futures (at the border) were initiated with a workshop at Grand Portage in 2007.