

# Encounters with Bobcats

November 10, 2012 at 1:59pm

**Bobcat (*Felis Rufas*)**



## **Suburban Wildcat**

Solitary and shy, bobcats are one of our reclusive urban wildlife species, although the cat is fairly common across the United States.

Bobcats are often mistaken for both mountain lions or very large domestic cats, but they differ from their feline cousins in several ways.

### **Cat Family**

Bobcats (*Felis rufus*) belong to the family of lynx, an early immigrant from Eurasia. The species first appeared about 2.5 million years ago and was generally larger in body size than bobcats of today, which weigh in on average from 20-40 lbs. Their coats tend to be tawny in color with obvious to faint black spots on its sides, flanks and legs. The face of a bobcat is round with pointed ears, which are black and have distinctive white spots on each ear tip. Their tails are short (bobbed), 4-6 inches in length. Bobcats are two to three times larger than a domestic cat, and are fuller and more muscular in body. The rear legs are proportionately longer than the front legs, unlike their domestic counterparts.

Bobcats prey on and eat a variety of animal species, from tree squirrels to deer, but will occasionally prey on livestock, fowl and rarely household pets, such as rabbits, cats and dogs. Bobcats have been known to enter chicken coops and kill all birds enclosed within, but eating only a few choice bits.

Bobcats can live in a variety of environments, from high altitude, snowy mountains to desert scrub, and live quite comfortably in city suburbs. Many suburban homes have quiet, secluded yards containing ample vegetation and trees to hide and ambush prey.

Bobcats are usually no threat to people, choosing to flee when seen or approached. They will, however, be protective of their cubs and will fight back if cornered, sick or injured. Like any cat, their sharp claws and teeth can inflict serious injuries, and they are extremely fast and agile.

Bobcats commonly breed in February and March. However, variations in the breeding season are influenced by latitude, longitude, altitude, climate, photoperiod, and perhaps prey availability. The male bobcat leaves the female to take care of the young herself. In 60 - 64 days, 2-3 kittens are born. After ten days they open their eyes and are eager to explore their surroundings.

## **Cat Clues**

Often times the same habitat bobcats find appealing are also home to coyotes. Although both kill domestic animals and occasionally confront people, coyotes are by far the most likely culprit in urban incidents. The signs left by coyotes and bobcats are as distinctive as the animals themselves.

“ Bobcat prints are usually 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 inches wide, and lack toenail prints as they have retractable claws. The pad of the foot is an ‘M’ shape. Coyotes leave toenail marks and the pad is shaped differently.

“ Bobcats often bury their scat like many members of the cat family whereas coyotes do not.

“ Bobcats tend to bury their catch and return to feed several times, again a habit not shared by coyotes.

“ It is much more common for coyotes to prey upon domestic cats and dogs. A mauled or missing pet is usually not the victim of a bobcat attack.

## **Bobcats and Disease**

Feline panleukopenia, mange and rabies are some of the diseases to which bobcats are susceptible. Many diseases are spread by parasites; bobcats are often exposed to many external and internal parasites. Some of these can be transmitted to our domestic pets and occasionally humans. Make sure your pet’s vaccinations are up to date.

Bobcats and other wildlife may behave strangely if afflicted with disease. These animals may often be forced to look for food and water in residential areas, the easiest places to find sustenance. If you see these animals behaving strangely, appearing sick, or refusing to leave when encountered, you should contact your local animal care and control facility.

## **Feeding Wildlife**

Wild animals, including bobcats, may become comfortable with humans if food is intentionally provided for them. It is unlawful to intentionally provide food for any mammalian predator including bobcats in the City of Los Angeles, (L.A.M.C. 53.06.5) Animals accustomed to human

handouts can become dangerous not only to the feeder but the surrounding area's residents as well. Often, these animals have to be euthanized for the danger they represent to the community.

## **Discouraging Bobcats**

Because of their quiet and secluded cat-like ways, bobcats are generally easy to persuade to leave. However, if you're finding a bobcat regularly visiting, try some of the following:

- Use noise and motion activated deterrents to make the bobcat uncomfortable. Try an air horn, motion activated sprinkler, bang pans together, or put a radio outside set to a news or talk station.
- Clear excess vegetation to remove secluded hiding places.
- Do not leave pet food or water outside when your pet is indoors.
- Pick fruit from trees as soon as it ripens and pick up all fallen fruit.
- Use fencing to help deter bobcats. The fence must be at least six feet tall with the bottom extending 6-12 inches below ground level. Add an angle at the top facing outward at 45 degrees and 16 inches wide. (fences over 6 feet may require a variance)
- Restrict feeding birds and squirrels, Bobcats are attracted to many of the small animals that come to our yards.

These tips work on other wild animals as well. Make the wildlife in your area wary of your presence. By doing so, you will save these animals lives, and create a more secure environment for you, your family and your pets.

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