

Living With Bobcats

There are two species of lynx in North America: the common lynx (*Felis lynx*) and the red lynx (*Felis rufus*), otherwise known as the bobcat. Lynxes and bobcats are also called wildcats. San Diego County only has bobcats.

Bobcat coat colors vary, but most are reddish above and pale underneath with some patterned dark stripes or spots. A distinctive characteristic of both lynxes and bobcats is the tuft of fur on each ear.

Bobcats weigh 15 to 35 pounds and have a short bobbed tail with black on the tip. Their ears are long with 1/2-inch black tufts at the end, and their large noses resemble rubber erasers.

Bobcats live in varied habitats including rocks, brush, and dense vegetation.

Bobcats are found below 8,000 feet in all of the western states and Canada. Although bobcats prefer rimrocks and gullies in the West, they also roam swamps and woodlands in other areas. They den in rock crevices and hollow logs. Their territories (small compared to those of mountain lions) vary with food supply, averaging 4 to 15 square miles.

Bobcats eat a varied diet, including rats, mice, rabbits, squirrels, carrion, and insects, so they rarely encounter food shortages. Like mountain lions, bobcats use stealth in hunting their prey, often waiting for hours near a game trail for prey to come within their 10-foot springing range.

Bobcats are solitary and active both day and night. They see well in darkness because their eyes have a special light reflector behind the retina; they also have extremely well developed hearing for locating prey. They are expert tree-climbers and swimmers and powerful fighters. Their large scent-marked territories are traveled daily. They have a life span of 15 to 20 years.

As with all large carnivores, the bobcat's main enemy is humans. People have been killing these animals (hunting and trapping them for pelts) for profit since 1730. In some parts of the country, hunting them is still permitted, though they are valuable to farmers because they eat many rodents. Bobcats have few natural enemies, and their primary defenses include speedy escapes and tree-climbing.

Bobcats are the most common wild felid in the U.S. and Canada, but their numbers are decreasing due to hunting and habitat loss. In 1977-1978, more than 85,000 bobcat skins were harvested. Their current status is controversial. Some experts believe that they are common and have adapted well to habitat loss and human hunting and intrusion; others assert that they are endangered.

Bobcats are most likely to be seen in remote, rugged country during early morning or late afternoon feeding times. Because of their elusive nature and caution around humans, however, they are rarely seen

TIPS

Unlike mountain lions, bobcats have adapted to human settlement of wildlands. Even a woodlot in a

farming area can sustain a pair of bobcats. Often people living on farms and in small towns are unaware of bobcats living nearby.

Bobcats avoid human contact as much as possible, and if you can share your land peacefully with a resident bobcat, it will help keep down rodent populations. Natural rodent control is preferable to man-made poisons and inhumane traps.

Bobcats remain a strong link in the ecological cycle. State laws protect bobcats in many areas.

1. Do not feed the bobcat.
2. Never leave pet food outside.
3. Restrict use of birdseed. Bobcats are attracted to the birds and rodents that use the feeder
4. If possible, eliminate outdoor sources of water. Generally, home owners cannot eliminate sources of water that attract bobcats (i.e., drip irrigation, fish ponds, bird baths). You might purchase a large water dish (as for a large dog), put it on the outside of your fence, and keep it filled with water.
5. Trim and clear near ground level any shrubbery that provides cover for bobcats or prey.
6. Use fencing to help deter bobcats. The fence must be at least six feet tall with the bottom extending at least six inches below ground level. Augment your existing fencing with outwardly inverted fencing, hot wire, or cement blocks and large rocks buried outside the fence line to prevent animals from digging into your yard.
7. Actively discourage bobcats by making loud noises and throwing rocks to make them leave.
8. Battery operated flashing lights, tape recorded human noises, scattered moth balls and ammonia-soaked rags strategically placed may deter bobcats from entering your yard.
9. Keep cats and small dogs indoors, allowing them outside only under strict supervision.
10. Keep chickens, rabbits and other small animals in well protected areas and in sturdy cages at night. Cages made of chicken wire are meant only for keeping small animals contained. They will not keep bobcats or other predators from entering.

Stronger gauge wiring is a necessity in protecting these small animals.

11. Trapping and relocation of bobcats is not a recommended or viable alternative. Wild animals are territorial and like species will simply take over the area vacated by the relocated or dead animal.

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