



Wildlife Notes

Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)

Bobcats survive in a variety of geographic areas and life zones. Found in every county in New Mexico, this highly adaptable member of the cat family can range from sandy deserts in the lower Sonoran zone to high mountains in the alpine. Although elusive and difficult to observe, the bobcat's habitat can even include densely populated urban areas.

Sometimes confused with the lynx, bobcats are much smaller, weighing 12–40 pounds. Their ears are more erect, sharply pointed and have prominent tufts. Other distinguishing differences can be recognized on the body. The bobcat has spotted flanks which are mottled with black, gray and reddish colors, compared with the lynx which has a larger solid gray body. Other differences include the bobcat's striped face and legs and its short tail with alternating rings of dark and light hair and a spotted end. The lynx has a longer, solid-gray tail with a black tip.

A wanderer by nature and shy and seldom seen, the bobcat may roam in open valleys but prefers the cover of cliffs and rocky slopes, where their dens are usually located.

The mating season for bobcats is from February until September, with a gestation period lasting

about 60 days. Normally once a year, females give birth to a single litter, usually of three kittens.

Like other cats, bobcats are nocturnal hunters but occasionally may hunt during the day. Growing thick, long coats in winter, bobcats hunt year-round and are savage fighters when taking prey. With short bursts of speed, a bobcat can overtake a rider on horseback. An opportunistic hunter, their diet commonly includes rodents, rabbits, grouse, quail, deer and insects.

Bobcats depend on evasiveness and seclusion to avoid predators, including coyotes, mountain lions and especially humans. Bobcats fortunately survived predator control programs conducted in the early 1900s, when bounties were offered and poisons used to control livestock predation.

Thankfully, bobcats have survived and today are protected by New Mexico state law. Although bobcats are not considered furbearers, they may be trapped with a license in winter months.

Sometimes called wildcats for a reason, remember to be cautious if you should corner a bobcat. It will defend itself vigorously.



Photo by Dan Williams.

Know the difference between a bobcat and a lynx!

Bobcat

- Underside of the tail is white to the tip.
- Ear tufts are under 1 inch in length.
- Cheek tufts are not prominent.
- Brownish color with black spots (usually) on the belly.
- Total length from 25–37 inches.
- Feet appear small with no hair between pads.
- Track size is under 2½ inches wide.
- Stride length is 20 inches.



Lynx

- Tail has a black tip and is not white underneath.
- Ear tufts are at least 1½ inches in length.
- Cheek tufts prominent.
- Grayish color with no spots on the belly
- Total length from 32–37 inches.
- Feet appear large with pads covered by hair.
- Track size is 3½–4½ inches wide.
- Stride length is 28 inches.



New Mexico Department of Game and Fish www.wildlife.state.nm.us

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