

Bobcat

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is native to Rhode Island, though it has never been considered to be common or widespread in the state. Recent indicators such as sightings, reports and road-kills suggest the population is currently on the rise, both locally and regionally. They are very adaptable and, given adequate food resources and habitat, can tolerate human-altered environments and activity. As a result of more available prey animals, or because individuals are branching out to find new territory, bobcats are being observed more frequently in local neighborhoods and developed areas. Bobcats rarely pose a danger to humans or to pets, but will occasionally take domestic chickens and ducks that are not properly protected, and will commonly visit birdfeeders in search of squirrels or birds.

BOBCAT IDENTIFICATION

Bobcats have a short “bobbed” tail with a white tip. They have black, tufted ears adorned with white spots, and their fur is reddish to tawny brown. Patterns of black spots and stripes vary among individuals.

Length: 32-34 in

Height: 22 in

Weight: Females 13-20 lbs, males 25-30 lbs with some individuals >30lbs

Lifespan: 10-12 years, likely less in the wild

LIFE HISTORY

Range and Habitat: Bobcats are the most numerous and widely distributed wild felines in North America. Over time, this species has adapted to live in a variety of habitats including swamps, deserts, grassland, shrubland, forest, mountains, and agricultural land.

Behavior: Bobcats are solitary animals, co-mingling only during the mating season or while females are rearing young. Bobcats are crepuscular, which means

they are most active around dawn and dusk, however they can be active any time of the day or night. They are territorial animals, meaning they will actively exclude other individuals of their species or sex from an area that they consider to be exclusively theirs. Territory size can vary depending on season, sex, and prey distribution and abundance.

Reproduction: Breeding can take place anytime between late February and May. Females will establish dens in boulder piles, brush piles, thickets, hollow logs, exposed roots or even underneath man-made structures. Males do not participate in raising the young. Kittens are born 50 to 60 days following breeding, with a typical litter size of two to five. Juveniles will often stay with the mother through their first winter, sometimes until the next breeding season. Juvenile males tend to leave the maternal home range earlier than their female siblings and may wander widely in search of habitat unoccupied by mature males. Female bobcats can reproduce after one year, while males typically begin breeding after two years.

Food Habits: Bobcats prey on a variety of small mammals, such as mice, voles, woodchucks, and chipmunks, as well as birds. In our area, cottontail rabbits and squirrels are probably the most important prey species for bobcats. They are capable of killing white-tailed deer, especially fawns, but are not significant predators of deer. They are ambush predators, meaning they stalk their prey before pouncing. Bobcats can tolerate long periods without food, and then eat heavily when it becomes available again.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Bobcats can travel up to 12 miles a night.
- Bobcats have excellent hearing and vision.
- Bobcats do not hibernate.
- Bobcats can take down a deer in deep snow.

THREATS

Habitat Loss: Despite their apparent success in recent years, it is difficult to predict how they will do in the future. Habitat loss and fragmentation are the biggest threats facing bobcats in Rhode Island. Bobcats have large home ranges and are forced to cross roads in search of food which leads to increased road mortality. Habitat loss and degradation continue to consume the best habitat for bobcats and other native wildlife. Bobcats have exhibited a remarkable ability to tolerate humans but to ensure and maintain bobcat populations into the future will require large areas of lands protected from development.

TO REPORT A BOBCAT SIGHTING:

Contact RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife Great Swamp Field Office: (401) 789-0281

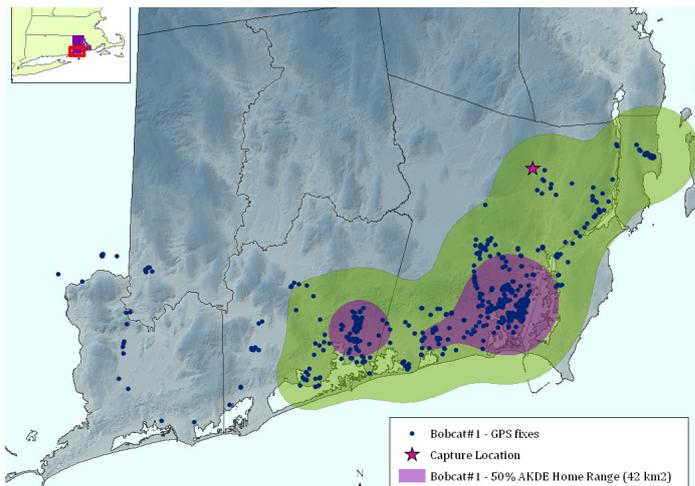
Please send bobcat photos to:
DEM.DFW@dem.ri.gov

Disease: Rabies can infect bobcats, just like all other mammalian species. They are not a common host and, to date, there have been no confirmed cases in Rhode Island. Other possible threats are mange, feline distemper (Panleukopenia) and various parasites such as ticks and fleas.

Rodenticides: Rodenticides are a threat not only to bobcats, but any animal that consumes small mammals as prey, such as hawks and owls. The poisoned rodents are consumed by larger predators, and small amounts of the poison builds up to fatal levels as more contaminated prey is eaten.

REGULATORY STATUS

Bobcats are classified under general law (*RIGL 20-16-1*) as a protected furbearer in Rhode Island. **There is no open hunting or trapping season for bobcats.** It is illegal to possess the carcass of a bobcat and road-kills should be reported to the Division of Fish and Wildlife. The carcass provides valuable biological information, such as population age structure, dietary habits and reproductive potential. The taking of road-killed furbearers, including bobcats, is prohibited without special authorization from the Division of Fish and Wildlife.



In a partnership study with the University of Rhode Island Wildlife Ecology & Genetics Lab, RI Division of Fish and Wildlife has monitored bobcat behavior and habitat preferences with the help of GPS collars.



Bobcat tracks typically lack claw marks, the front of the toe pad has 2-lobes and the rear of the pad has 3-lobes. Front paw length average 4.1 – 6.4 cm. Photo courtesy of C. Brown.

TIPS TO PROTECT LIVESTOCK & PETS

- Bury enclosure fencing at least 1ft down on all sides
- Bring animals inside before dark
- Cover the top of outdoor enclosures
- Frequently check enclosures for holes
- Remove other potential food sources: Outdoor pet dishes, unsecure trash bins, compost piles

Never intentionally feed wildlife.

It is illegal in Rhode Island and will create problems for humans and wildlife alike.