



# Wildlife Information Guide

## **Bobcat** *(Lynx rufus)*

### **DESCRIPTION**

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is a medium-sized North American wildcat widely distributed across the United States, including all of New England. It is highly adaptable, occupying forests, swamps, agricultural edges, and increasingly suburban landscapes. Bobcats are apex mesopredators whose presence reflects ecosystem stability and prey availability.

### **PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS**

Bobcats measure 26–41 inches in body length, with shoulder heights of 18–24 inches and weights ranging from 15–35 pounds, males larger than females. Their short “bobbed” tail has a black tip on the upper surface only, a key field identifier. Coat coloration varies from gray-brown to reddish with dark spots and bars, providing effective camouflage. Tufted ears enhance hearing and visual signaling.

### **BEHAVIOR**

Bobcats are primarily crepuscular but may be active day or night depending on prey and human pressure. They maintain defined home ranges: males 10–40 square miles, females smaller. Movement follows ridgelines, logging roads, and edge habitats. Bobcats are solitary except during breeding or when females rear kittens. They are strong climbers and swimmers but rely primarily on stealth and ambush.

### **REPRODUCTION**

Breeding occurs January through March in New England. After a gestation of approximately 60–63 days, females give birth to 1–4 kittens, most commonly 2–3. Dens are located in rock ledges, hollow trees, blowdowns, or brush piles. Kittens remain with the female for up to one year. Reproductive success is closely tied to prey abundance.

### **DIET**

Bobcats are obligate carnivores. Primary prey includes rabbits, hares, rodents, squirrels, and birds. In New England, cottontail rabbits are a key food source. Bobcats will



opportunistically take deer fawns, especially in spring, and occasionally scavenge carrion. Diet composition shifts seasonally with prey availability.

### **DEFENSIVE MECHANISMS**

Bobcats rely on avoidance, concealment, and aggression when cornered. Physical adaptations include sharp retractile claws, powerful jaws, and explosive short-burst speed. Cryptic coloration and silent movement reduce detection. When threatened, bobcats may hiss, growl, or strike defensively.

### **BEHAVIOR DEFENSES**

Solitary behavior reduces disease transmission and competition. Large territories limit overlap. Nocturnal flexibility allows avoidance of humans. Den sites are carefully selected for concealment and limited access.

### **REPRODUCTIVE DEFENSES**

Females frequently move kittens between dens to avoid predator discovery. Low reproductive rate is offset by high juvenile survival in quality habitat.

### **MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Bobcats play a critical role in regulating prey populations. Human-bobcat conflicts are rare and usually involve poultry or small livestock. Management emphasizes habitat conservation, public education, and regulated harvest where legal.

### **SCIENTIFIC REFERENCES**

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1. Anderson, E.M. (1987). A critical review and annotated bibliography of literature on the bobcat. *Colorado Division of Wildlife Special Report*.
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This document represents current scientific understanding of bobcat biology and behavior as of 2025. Information should be used in conjunction with local wildlife management guidelines and regulations.

