

# Bobcats

Prepared by the National Wildlife Control Training Program. <http://WildlifeControlTraining.com>  
 Research-based, certified wildlife control training programs to solve human – wildlife conflicts.  
 One source for training, animal handling and control methods, and wildlife species information.



**Figure 1. Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*). Photo by Dave Menke, US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).**

## Species Overview

### Conflicts

Although bobcats are very secretive and avoid direct contact with people, they can prey on pets and small livestock. Their scratching of trees also may cause some concern.

### Legal Status

In South Carolina, the bobcat is legally classified as a furbearer and can be taken by hunting or trapping during the open season. The season for trapping these animals is December 1 through March 1. Hunting season is Thanksgiving Day through March 1 on private lands with a valid hunting license. Anyone planning to trap bobcats should be familiar with the regulations which govern this activity. Information on these regulations can be obtained online at: <http://www.dnr.sc.gov>.

Nuisance bobcats can also be taken year-round with a **Depredation Permit**. A

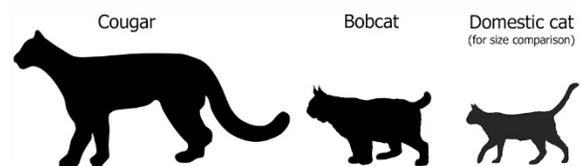
depredation permit is not required when controlling nuisance furbearers within 100 yards of a property owner's residence. This permit is issued by the S.C. Department of Natural Resources. To obtain a permit call your local wildlife management office or law enforcement field office.

For further information:  
<http://www.dnr.sc.gov>.

### Identification

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*, Figure 1), also called a "wildcat," is a medium-sized member of the North American cat family. It can be distinguished at a distance by its graceful catlike movements, 4- to 6-inch "bobbed" tail, round face, and pointed ears. The tip of the tail has black hair, and prominent white dots are on the upper sides of the ears. Body hair color varies, but the sides and flanks usually are brownish black or reddish brown with either distinct or faint black spots. In southern states, bobcats may have a yellowish or reddish cast on their backs and necks.

The bobcat is two to three times the size of the domestic cat and appears more muscular and fuller in the body (Figure 2).



**Figure 2. Relative size comparison of the cougar, bobcat, and domestic cat. Image by Dee Ebbeka.**

### Physical Description

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Male bobcats tend to be larger than females. Adult males are 32 to 40 inches long and weigh from 14 to 45 pounds. Adult females typically are 28 to 32 inches long and weigh from 9 to 33 pounds.

### Species Range

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The bobcat occurs in a wide variety of habitats from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean and from Mexico to northern British Columbia. Bobcats live in all 48 contiguous states.

### Health and Safety Concerns

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Bobcats generally avoid contact with people. On the rare occasions when bobcats have attacked people, they usually had rabies. Bobcats can pose threats to pets weighing less than 20 pounds.

### General Biology, Reproduction, and Behavior

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#### Reproduction

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Adult bobcats usually are solitary except during the breeding season. Bobcats do not form lasting pair bonds. Breeding typically occurs between January and June, but can be affected by latitude, longitude, altitude, and characteristics of each bobcat population. The gestation period in bobcats ranges from 50 to 70 days, with an average of 62 days. Most young are born from March to July. Bobcats weigh about  $\frac{3}{8}$  pound at birth. Litters contain from 2 to 4 kittens. Kittens nurse for about 60 days and may accompany their mother through their first winter. Although young bobcats grow very quickly during their first 6 months, males may not be fully grown until 1½ years and females until 2 years of age. Bobcats may live for at least 12 years in the wild.

### Nesting/Denning Cover

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Bobcats den in caves, gaps in rock formations, abandoned beaver lodges, and even human-made structures.

### Behavior

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Bobcats are secretive, shy, solitary, and seldom seen in the wild. They are active during the day but prefer twilight, dawn, or night hours.

Bobcats tend to travel well-worn animal trails, logging roads, and other paths. They use their keen vision and hearing to locate prey and enemies.

A bobcat typically is territorial and will maintain the same territory throughout its life.

Territories range in size from 1 to 40 acres.

Bobcats commonly move 1 to 4 miles each day within their home range. Juveniles have been known to move up to 100 miles in search of a new territory.

### Habitat

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Bobcats live in all sorts of habitat, from subtropical forests to high and dry rimrock. Other habitats include chaparral, wooded streams, river bottoms, canyon lands, and coniferous forests to 9,000 feet in elevation. Bobcats prefer areas where these native habitat types are interspersed with agriculture and escape cover such as rocky outcrops.

### Food Habits

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Bobcats are carnivores, capable of hunting and killing prey that range from the size of a mouse to an adult deer. Rabbits, tree squirrels, ground squirrels, woodrats, porcupines, pocket gophers, and ground hogs make up most of their diet. Opossums, raccoons, grouse, wild turkeys, and other ground-nesting birds also are eaten. Occasionally, insects, reptiles, and

livestock are a part of their diet. At times bobcats resort to scavenging.



**Figure 3. Tracks of the bobcat. Image by Dee Ebbeka.**

### Voice, Sounds, Tracks, and Signs

Bobcats caterwaul during mating season and hiss, puff, spit, and growl in response to threats. Bobcat tracks lack claw marks, are about 2 inches in diameter, and resemble those of a large house cat (Figure 3). The length between tracks in their walking stride is about 7 inches and trails reveal a zig-zag walking pattern as they hunt.

### Damage Identification

Bobcats are opportunistic predators, feeding on poultry, livestock, house cats, small dogs, and game animals.

Carcasses of bobcat kills often are distinguishable from those of cougar, coyote, and fox. Bobcats bite the skull, neck, or throat of small prey such as lambs, kids, or fawns, and leave claw marks on the sides, back, and shoulders of larger prey. A single bite to the throat, just behind the victim's jaws, leaves canine teeth marks  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch apart.

### Damage to Landscapes

Bobcats may leave claw marks and spray urine on trees and other scent. These marks are 10 to 12 inches long.

### Damage to Crops and Livestock

Bobcats occasionally prey on waterfowl, poultry, sheep, goats, and calves.

### Damage to Structures

Bobcats do not damage structures.

### Damage Prevention and Control Methods

#### Habitat Modification

Most types of habitat modification are too expensive and too damaging to the environment to implement on a broad scale. In small locales, however, remove ground cover to reduce prey species and the cover bobcats need to hunt. Eliminate food sources that attract other animals. Do not feed or water your pets outdoors. Modify bird feeders to prevent seed from reaching the ground, as spillage attracts rodents.

#### Exclusion

Use woven-wire enclosures to discourage bobcats from entering poultry and small animal pens at night. Bobcats can climb wooden fence posts and can jump fences 6 feet or more in height. Use woven wire overhead if necessary.

Add two electric wires at 12 and 18 inches above the ground to prevent bobcats from climbing fences.

#### Frightening Devices

Use night lighting in conjunction with white flashing lights, or bright continuous lighting, to repel bobcats. You also can use blaring music

and barking dogs to discourage bobcats temporarily.

### Repellents

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None are available.

### Toxicants

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None are registered.

### Shooting

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Legal hunting season on private lands in South Carolina for bobcats is Thanksgiving Day through March 1. A free depredation permit for nuisance bobcats may be issued to landowners who do not possess a hunting license.

Rifles of .22-caliber centerfire or larger, or shotguns with No. 2 or larger shot are recommended.

### Trapping

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In South Carolina, the legal trapping season is December 1 – March 1 for licensed trappers, however a private landowner may apply for a free depredation permit outside of the regular trapping season or if they do not have a trapping license. Permits can be obtained from any South Carolina DNR office or conservation officer.

Furbearer Trapping regulations can be obtained online at [www.dnr.sc.gov](http://www.dnr.sc.gov).

Bobcats often hunt by sight, so using a visual attractant can be effective. A flag set uses a piece of fur or a couple of feathers suspended about 4 feet above ground with fine wire or string. Bobcats can be drawn to traps by "flags" hung from trees or rocks located near trap sets (Figure 4). Where use of animal parts is prohibited, use aluminum foil, CD-ROMs, or imitation fur or feathers.



**Figure 4. Feathers suspended on a line with a fishing swivel will spin in the wind and attract the attention of bobcats. Photo by Stephen M. Vantassel.**

When properly set, very large cage traps made of wire mesh or metal are effective for catching bobcats (Figure 5). Use brush or grass on the top and sides of the cage to give the appearance of a natural "cubby" or recess in a rock outcrop or brush.

Location is the key to trapping bobcats. If the location is not correct, flags or baits will not work. Set traps in the vicinity of depredations, travel ways to and from cover, or hunting sites. Cover the bottom of the cage trap with soil.



**Figure 5. Bobcat caught in a cage trap. Photo by Claude Oleyar.**

## **Disposition**

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### **Relocation**

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Relocation of bobcats in South Carolina is not permitted.

### **Translocation**

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Relocation of bobcats in South Carolina is not permitted.

### **Euthanasia**

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Euthanasia by carbon dioxide is suitable for bobcats. When performed properly, shooting is appropriate.

## **Web Resources**

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<http://www.dnr.sc.gov>

<http://wildlifecontroltraining.com>

<http://icwdm.org/>

<http://wildlifecontrol.info>