

Bobcat Fact Sheet

SPECIES DESCRIPTION

The bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is a native mammal in Georgia and a member of the Felidae family. It may be classified as *Felis rufus* in some texts. Bobcats are about twice the size of the common house cat. Bobcats are generally yellowish brown with various streaks or spots of dark brown or black. The under parts are usually white with black spots and black bars on the insides of the legs. Females and males are colored the same, but males are generally larger. Males range from 12–40+ lbs. with an average of 18–28 lbs., while females range from 9–34 lbs. and average 14–20 lbs. The tail is short and gives the appearance of being “bobbed.”

RANGE AND HABITAT

The bobcat is the most widely distributed native felid in North America and is found statewide in Georgia. It can occupy a wide variety of habitats due to its wide prey base. Typical bobcat habitat in Georgia is mixed forest and agricultural areas that have a high percentage of early successional stages. Home range size depends on the sex of the bobcat and the quality of the habitat. Males generally have a much larger home range size than females with some males having a home range size of over 10 square miles. Female's home range size may be less than one square mile. Home ranges of both sexes of bobcats may overlap.

BIOLOGY AND LIFE HISTORY

The bobcat is a carnivore and an opportunistic predator. Common prey items include mice, rats, rabbits and various other small mammals. However, bobcats will also prey on reptiles, birds and feral cats. Bobcats can prey on animals as large as deer and will feed on hunter killed or road-killed deer.

The breeding season can begin as early as January and run through March. Most female and male bobcats do not breed until their second year. The average bobcat litter is 2–3 kittens following a 62-day gestation period. Dens may be located in caves, rock piles, hollow logs or trees, or under fallen trees. Den sites may be used several years in a row. Bobcat kittens weigh 10–12 ounces at birth and may gain up to 0.4 ounces per day. Their eyes are closed at birth and remain closed for approximately 10 days.

Kitten survival is linked to food abundance with years of plentiful food resulting in better kitten survival and years of poor food availability resulting in heavy mortality on bobcat kittens. Weaning takes place at around 12 weeks of age and the kittens begin hunting with their mother at around 5 months of age. Males do not assist with the raising of young, and except for the breeding season, lead predominantly solitary lives. Juvenile bobcats leave their mother before she gives birth the following year. Some studies have shown the juveniles leaving the first fall after their birth while other studies indicate the juveniles leaving the following spring.

Mortality on bobcats can be caused directly by other animals, by competition with other animals for food, diseases and parasites, and by man. Coyotes, hawks, and owls may prey on bobcat kittens and coyotes may out compete bobcats (especially juveniles) in years with low prey abundance. Rabies, tularemia, feline

panleukopenia, leptospirosis, and various other diseases and parasites may cause mortality in bobcats. Bobcats routinely reach 5–6 years of age and sometimes reach 12–13 years old in the wild. Captive bobcats have reached over 30 years of age.

SPORT AND ECONOMIC VALUE

Bobcats in Georgia are classified both as a game animal and a furbearer. This allows hunters and trappers to pursue the bobcat within regulated seasons. Hunting techniques for bobcat include the use of dogs and the use of manual predator calls. Trappers annually harvest between 1,200 and 1,800 bobcats while hunters harvest 3–5 times that many. The economic value of bobcat pelts varies depending on demand, fur thickness, color, number and brightness of spots, pelt size, etc. In the period 2000–2006, bobcat hunters and trappers have received \$25 - \$70 per pelt, depending on pelt size, color, fur thickness, and spottiness.

NUISANCE

Bobcats usually avoid areas of high human disturbance and development and only occasionally cause nuisance problems. They may occasionally prey on smaller livestock such as goats or chickens but overall are not a major nuisance problem.

