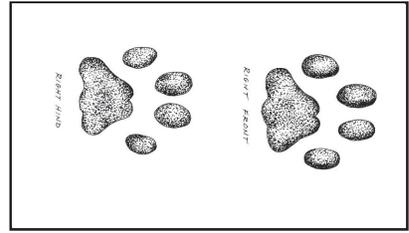
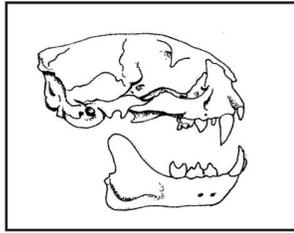
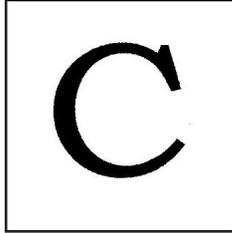
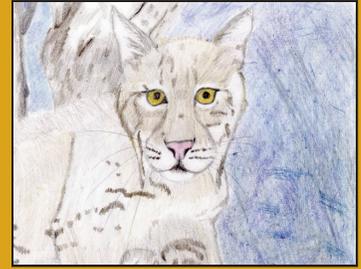




# Bobcat

Family Felidae  
*Felis rufus*



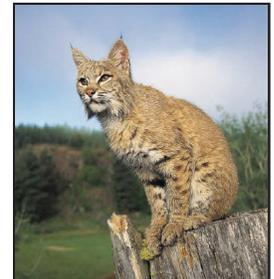
Of America's three wild cats, only the **Bobcat** (*Lynx rufus*) is officially listed as a resident of Pennsylvania anymore. And even bobcats (top right) are considered rare.

Sightings of **Mountain Lions** (*Felis concolor*) abound throughout the state but mountain lions (center) are still considered **an extant species**. That means they used to live in our state, but are no longer found here. As efforts continue to protect and restore our state's pristine forests, perhaps the big puma will once again stalk our woodlands on a regular basis.

Our bobcat is similar to Canada's **Lynx** (*Lynx lynx*), (below right). But **the bobcat is smaller with less prominent facial and ear tufts**. Sometimes the bobcat is called a bay lynx or red lynx.

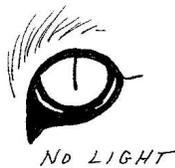
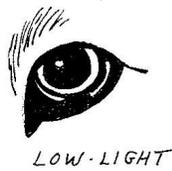
Despite their smaller size, bobcats possess the same predatory behavior of all cats: **very sharp senses of sight, smell & hearing**. Bobcats are true **carnivores**. Their four large canine teeth are capable of piercing their prey and their sharp molars enable them to further cut their food before gulping it down.

At maturity, a bobcat averages 36 inches in length and weighs 15-20 pounds, with large individuals as heavy as 35 pounds.



**Does it roar or purr?** Most small cats like bobcats or housecats belong to the genus *Felis*. They purr because the cartilage at the base of their tongue does not move. Big cats like lions belong to the genus *Panthera*. They have a flexible cartilage that allows them to roar. The exception? The cheetah - a big cat that only purrs. But bobcats do make noise. **Bobcats can wail, howl and have an ear-piercing scream**, especially during breeding season.





**Bobcats have large eyes** that are well-adapted to see in the dark. Like most **nocturnal** creatures, their pupils are slit-shaped or elliptically shaped in bright light. But in low light (at dusk, dark & dawn) they can open wide to admit what little light is available. Most animals that are **diurnal** (active during the day) have round pupils that stay round, no matter the lighting conditions. Bobcats could also be considered **crepuscular** creatures - active during dawn and dusk too.

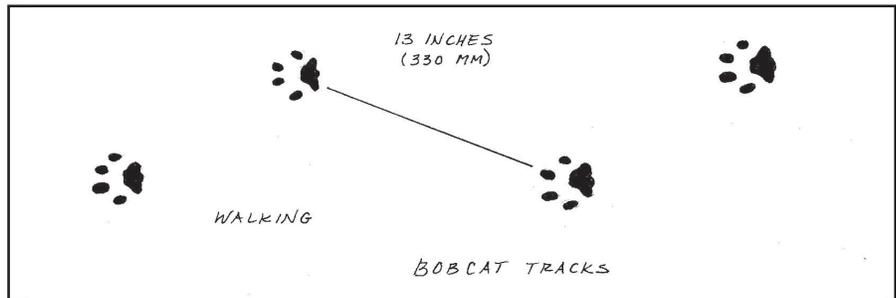


Nocturnal or elliptical pupil

**Two other eye adaptations help bobcats at night.** Lots of **rod cells** in their eyes. Rod cells allow them to pick up any available light at night, such as moonlight. Diurnal creatures have more cone cells. Those help us and other diurnal animals see color. It is believed that bobcats are only able to see in shades of gray. A **reflecting layer** within their eye helps them separate their prey from its surroundings - helping bobcats pinpoint their attack.

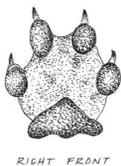


Diurnal or round pupil



RIGHT FRONT

Bobcat tracks



RIGHT FRONT

Fox tracks

**Cats are the only carnivore with retractable, hooked claws.** They have four clawed toes on each of their four feet. Their claws stay retracted to keep sharp for catching prey. This physical adaptation demands a change in hunting tactics from other carnivores. Hunters like wolves and coyotes use their claws for traction as they run down their prey. Bears use their claws for digging prey like ground squirrels out of burrows. But **cats stalk their prey.** When they pounce for the kill they extend their very sharp claws to grab hold of their prey, then quickly dispatch it with a suffocating bite to its throat.

Because the claws of cats are retracted within their paws their **tracks should not show any claw marks.** This helps distinguish bobcat tracks from other predators in Pennsylvania such as the coyote or fox - both of whom should have short claw marks showing in a clear track impression.

**Bobcats** are gray-brown with dark spots and bars that are especially noticeable on the legs. The underside of the neck, belly, lips & chin are white, and the ears are tipped with black. The bobcat's distinguishing "ruff" of longish hair extends out and downward from the cheeks.

Their hindlegs are muscular and longer than their front legs, giving them a **bobbing gait** when running. That bobbing gate **is one of the ways it got its name**. Another is their short or bobbed tail. They are excellent swimmers and equally agile jumpers - often choosing to leap across creeks or use fallen logs to walk across them. Bobcats can easily climb trees and will extend and use their claws to secure grip.



If you need to **design an efficient predator** you might want to use a cat as your model. They have **large eyes placed forward** on their face, just like people. This eye placement gives them **binocular vision** & depth perception. This is extremely helpful when you are trying to judge distance. For example, how far does the bobcat have to pounce in order to land on and catch the rabbit it sees?

Their senses of **eyesight & smell are superb**, allowing them to quietly search for prey and stalk it from a safe distance before closing in for the kill. Not only are they equipped for night vision, but their long **stiff whiskers** help them "feel" their way around in the dark - giving them another advantage over their prey.

They have large, impressive **canine teeth** for biting and killing. Their **molars are sharp** and designed for shearing meat from bones. Even their **tongue**, covered with raspy, pointed papillae, is designed to help scrap meat from bone.

And as discussed earlier, their **claws** are retractable and kept pulled up within their paws to keep them sharp until they are needed to grasp prey.



**Bobcats breed** from late February to early March. After 50-60 day gestation up to four fully-furred kittens are born in a leaf and moss-lined den (rock crevice, cave, hollow log). Blind and helpless at birth the kittens will spend several months with their mother while she teaches them to hunt and kill prey. Adult male bobcats or great horned owls may pose a threat to the kittens, but once bobcats reach adulthood their only real enemies are human.

**Bobcats hunt** mostly small animals like rodents, birds, rabbits and hares. But they are capable of taking larger prey like a skunk or even a porcupine. And like all predators, they will take anything if it is available and easy - fish, insects or crippled deer or carrion. They will often cover the remains of larger food items with leaves to cache it for another meal. They **mark their territory** with their feces, urine & scrape marks, using odor to notify other bobcats of their presence.

**Bobcats are generally found** in our northcentral and northeastern counties. Preferring deep forests, swamps and our most mountainous areas. According to the PA Game Commission, their numbers have increased during the past 20 years and they are continually expanding their range. But their status is considered vulnerable.



## A Simple Review of Bobcats & Wild Felines



**Bobcats** are wild felines that belong to the **order Carnivora**. They are true **carnivores**. Other carnivores like coyotes and bears eat meat, but they also eat fruits, seeds, nuts & berries. Not wild felines. The wild cats rarely eat anything except other animals. **The bobcat is the only wild cat left in Pennsylvania**. Mountain lions (top right) disappeared long ago due to over-hunting and loss of habitat. The Canada Lynx (top left) lives north of us, and looks like our bobcat, but is bigger with larger ear tufts.



**Wild cats quietly stalk their prey** thanks to furred feet with large, soft pads. They have four toes on each foot and sharp, curved, retractable claws. Retracted to keep sharp for grabbing their prey. Though sometimes bobcats will pull their claws out to scratch tree trunks or other rough objects - just like your pet cat.

Bobcats are muscular with **hind end taller than their front end**. This gives them a bobbing gait when they run. This and their short - bobbed - tail, gave the bobcat its name! Like all cats, they are very agile climbers and are capable of extreme bursts of speed.

**Scent glands** located on the feet and base of a cat's tail help them mark their territory and announce their arrival to other cats that may be around. They can travel far in search of another cat - up to 20 miles, especially during breeding season.

Cat skulls are flat-faced due to their short, blunt nose. They have **large eyes facing forward - great for binocular vision**. The eyes are well-suited for nocturnal hunts and their large, stiff whiskers help them "feel" in the dark. Large, powerful canines & sharp molars are used for tearing at prey. They even have a raspy tongue for licking meat off the bones.

**Cat ears** are upright and bobcat and lynx have **black tufts** of hair rising off the ear tips. They also have thick ruffs of fur on their cheeks. Like most cats they are considered very intelligent.

**Wild cats are shy and secretive**. Most of the year they are solitary animals, except when the male seeks out a female to mate with. One litter of kittens is born each year and the female will remain with the young until they are able to hunt on their own. After that, all family members split and the cats remain alone until the following year during breeding season.