



# LIVING WITH BOBCATS

(Lynx rufus)

## BENEFITS OF BOBCATS

Bobcats play an important ecological role. They're effective predators of small mammals such as rodents, rabbits and squirrels, helping to keep our ecosystems balanced and healthy. Texas Parks and Wildlife biologists found 23 rodents in the stomach of just one bobcat in a recent urban bobcat study!



## CHARACTERISTICS

Bobcats in the DFW area usually weigh 15 to 30 pounds and are about twice the size of a house cat, with males being a little bigger than the females. Their fur ranges in color and pattern and is designed to blend in well with their environment. Some bobcats have more distinct spot patterns than others. The fur on its undersides is lighter in color. A bobcat's coat is like a fingerprint, it's unique to the individual and can be used to identify them. They have facial ruffs, ear tufts and white spots near the tips of their ears and bobbed tails. Bobcat tails can range in size as well. Their back legs are disproportionately longer than their front legs.

## NATURAL HISTORY

Bobcats are native to Texas and can be found all over the continental United States. They're the most common wild cat in North America and can adapt to a variety of habitats, including suburban areas. Bobcats tend to be elusive, solitary and are very territorial. Sightings of multiple bobcats are usually a mom with her offspring. Bobcats are single moms and they take care of kittens without any help from the father. Kittens are born in the spring or early summer. If moms lose their kittens they can go right back into heat and have another litter at any time during the year. Their gestation period is about 62 days and they give birth to 2 to 4 kittens on average. Kittens are born with their eyes closed and rely on their mom's milk for food. After about two months kittens will begin to eat meat. Female bobcats raise their kittens in a sheltered area and often move them to different densites to keep them safe from predators. The kittens will stay with their mom for 9 to 12 months and learn survival skills until they're old enough to survive on their own. They can live 5 to 15 years in the wild.



## DIET

Bobcats are carnivores and most of their diet consists of rabbits, rodents and squirrels, but they'll also feed on birds, fawns, reptiles, amphibians, insects and eggs. They use sight and sound to hunt, and they stalk and ambush to catch their prey. It's uncommon, but possible, that free-roaming cats or small dogs left outside unattended might become bobcat prey as well.

# THREATS

There are currently no legal protections for bobcats in Texas so they can be hunted and killed at any time. Their pelts are used in the fur trade both here in the U.S. and overseas. Today, their greatest threat is the continuing loss of habitat. Secondary rodenticide poisoning from eating dying or dead rodents is also another cause of sickness and death.



## KEEP YOUR PETS SAFE

- Do not leave unattended dogs and cats outdoors, especially from dusk to dawn. Left outside at night and even during the day, small pets may become prey to bobcats, coyotes, hawks or owls.
- Enclose pet birds and poultry in a secure pen or house. Properly secure domestic birds to reduce their risk of becoming prey to bobcats.
- Do not allow cats to be free-roaming outdoors. Most cities have laws against free-roaming cats. Cats prey on many wildlife species, i.e. songbirds, face many dangers outside and can attract predatory wildlife to your yard.
- Always keep pets vaccinated as some wildlife are susceptible to diseases transmissible to dogs and cats, i.e. Feline Panleukopenia (feline parvo), Leptospirosis, Canine Distemper and Rabies.
- Clean up brushy areas or woodpiles and remove any food sources.
- Make sure your fence is in good repair. Secure entrances under decks, outbuildings or entrances under pier and beam homes to prevent denning opportunities.
- A leashed dog is a safer dog. When out for a walk, keep your pet leashed to greatly reduce the chance of a negative wildlife encounter. Use a 6-foot leash or shorter and do not use a retractable leash.
- Avoid any bushy, natural areas or paths near abandoned properties, especially during the springtime.
- Never encourage or allow your pet to interact or “play” with wildlife.



## COEXISTENCE GUIDELINES

- Do not feed wildlife. This increases the chance that the animal will lose its natural fear of humans.
- If you don't want bobcats in your backyard, don't make it inviting to them. Feed dogs and cats indoors and clean up after them. Water, pet food and droppings can attract wildlife.
- Remove birdfeeders. Bird food attracts birds during the day and rodents at night, which will attract predators.
- If you see bobcat kittens, do not move or handle "abandoned" baby bobcats. Mothers leave their babies alone while they hunt for food. Baby bobcats found alone are typically not orphans, and mom will move them eventually.
- If you notice a bobcat in your area, never let it go by without scaring it. Yell or clap loudly to scare wildlife away, carry something with you to make noise, e.g.- an air horn, or something to throw like a rock or baseball in their direction, not directly at the bobcat.
- In the long run it's much safer for us, our pets, and the wildlife as well – if they remain fearful of humans.

