

The Canadian lynx In Colorado

After all these years of stomping around in the outdoors, I can honestly say I have never seen a lynx in Colorado. In fact, the only place I have ever seen a lynx was in Canada while there on a fishing trip.

The Canadian lynx, also known as a snowcat, had completely disappeared from Colorado by the early 1970s. Sightings prior to that had become a very rare occurrence and were scattered about various mountainous areas of the state.

A lynx sighting was made famous on Facebook in December 2016. The snowcat was spotted and videoed walking across a ski slope at Purgatory Ski Resort in southwest Colorado.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officials who reviewed the various videos were concerned about the health of the cat, as it did not appear well. Two weeks later, members of the ski patrol found the cat dead on the west side of the resort.

A mother lynx and her kitten were spotted on nearby Molas Pass around the same time. Those animals walked calmly along the road as a motorist stopped and took pictures.

There was a real possibility that the lynx would be added to the federal Endangered Species Act. By the year 2000, the lynx was listed as threatened under the ESA.

In 1999, CPW began a reintroduction program in our state. CPW reintroduced a total of 218 lynx from 1999 to 2006 in the San Juan Mountains of the southwest portion of Colorado.

The lynx were captured in Alaska and Canada and many were monitored with radio and satellite collars. The lynx has become very adept at adjusting to Colorado's mountains and have been continually expanding their range.

By 2010, CPW had concluded that Colorado-born lynx had successfully produced third-generation Colorado kittens. In 2010, researchers estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of female lynx bore litters of kittens. The lynx breed in the winter and have a gestation period of around nine weeks. The female will have a litter of about three or four kittens in April or May.

In 2015, CPW began a long-term monitoring program for the lynx, which could last as long as 10 years. The program will concentrate on Southwest Colorado, encompassing 5,400 square miles and reaching into 6 wilderness areas. The main objective is to determine if the population of the lynx is increasing or decreasing.

The lynx is a large and bob-tailed cat, reaching over 3 feet in length and weighing in around 30 pounds. Their coat is a grayish white to tan color with spots. The most noticeable feature is the incredible ear tufts, which may be as long as the cat's actual ears.

The lynx is often confused with the bobcat. Bobcats are legal to hunt in Colorado, so great care must be exercised to not confuse them with lynx.

Bobcats are somewhat smaller and not as tall as a lynx. The bobcat has a reddish color fur and the spots are more prominent. A lynx's tail has a solid black tip, while a bobcat's tail has a black tip broken with a reddish band. The bobcat does not have that beautiful ear tuft that the lynx has.

The lynx is a silent predator that lives in the very dense subalpine forests and along streams and avalanche chutes. The rugged territory that the lynx lives in is why we probably do not see them very often, as they rarely expose themselves.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



(Top) A close-up of a Canadian Lynx or snowcat, showing the thick fur, ear tufts and large feet.

(Left) For comparison, here is a picture of a bobcat. Notice the spots and the tail.

(Submitted photos/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

The country the lynx lives in is also home to the snowshoe hare, which is the favorite food of the lynx. The lynx will also dine on red squirrels and the occasional grouse.

The reintroduction of the lynx to Colorado has been a major success story for the CPW. The plan CPW used has become a model for other species reintroduction in other states.

The lynx population is generally in the southwestern quarter of the state. Most sightings occur around Wolf Creek Pass but some reports come from Monarch Pass and White River National Forest.

Sighting a lynx is such a rare occurrence that CPW wants to hear from you whenever you see one. CPW has a special form on their website at www.cpw.state.co.us

that you can fill out to report a sighting. The CPW follows up on all sightings, usually with aircraft flights in the area of the sighting.

I spend a lot of time in the high country, between hunting, hiking and riding the ATVs, so there is a chance that one day I might see a lynx in Colorado. Hopefully, you might see one while you are out on the trails.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, and an avid hunter and travels all across North America in search of adventure, who serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.



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Don't give up on...

...snow coming! In 1976, there were 6 ski days in Telluride. In 1978 the snow started in November and was still snowing into early May. And then there was the famous Spring Break snow dump in 1985. Otherwise known as the "oh, my gosh, is it ever going to stop" snow! We received over two feet in about 24 hours at the end of March. I was out shoveling like crazy to keep our deck from collapsing. Keep the faith, Montrose!

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