

All about the bobcat



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My wife and I were having a discussion about animals in Colorado that we have not seen. The first one that comes to mind is the Black-footed ferrets.

They are the rarest mammal in North America but have recently been making a comeback in Colorado, but I have never seen one.

Another is the poor kit fox. They have been a protected species in Colorado since 1994. Kit fox are yet another victim of development as their native agriculture grounds disappear in the name of progress.

An animal you may think is rare because, so few people have actually seen one, is the bobcat. My wife is a native to our state and has never seen one.

I have seen a dozen or so in Colorado, but have also seen them in Texas, Florida, and Canada. They are doing quite well in most of North America.

The bobcat, who answers to the street name *Lynx rufus*, is the most common wildcat in North America. Estimates put his numbers between 2.3 million and 3.5 million, being found in Mexico, 5 Canadian provinces, and 47 U.S. states (not Delaware.)

However, bobcats are very elusive and rarely seen across their range.

These cats are similar to the lynx, but smaller, weighing in between 10 and 30 pounds, and reaching up to 42 inches



The elusive bobcats blends in nicely with his habitat. (Courtesy photo/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

in length, not counting the tail.

The northern cats grow larger than the southern ones. They are easily identified by their tail that has a cut or bobbed look, hence their name. The tail can reach up to eight inches long.

Bobcats are easily misidentified by people. Folks often mistake them for feral cats or a lynx. Some people have thought they were a mountain lion, even though the lion is much larger and has a very long tail.

We even had reports in Florida where people thought they saw one of the very rare Florida panthers.

The earliest known member of the *Lynx* genus evolved in Africa around four million years ago, way before my time, and was known as the *Issoire lynx*.

Over time, this cat spread north into Eurasia, and from there, crossed the Bering Strait into North America. Today's bobcats are descended from these old-world cats.

The dinner menu for bobcats includes birds, rodents, and small furry critters, but their favorite is rabbits. They can bring down a white-tailed deer, usually the fawns, but can bring down an adult.

To slay such a large animal, the cat will jump onto its back and bite through the throat. They are even good swimmers and will not hesitate to jump in the water after a beaver.

Being solitary hunters, a bobcat may lay claim to up to 18 square miles of ground. In that territory, there could be several dens that they will guard. An individual bobcat will mark his territory by scratching up or excreting on some trees around the area.

Because they cannot always consume their kill in one sitting, bobcats often cover their kill. The cat will use dirt, snow, leaves, or grass to bury the leftovers, and often return to dig up the kill.

This is known as caching, and it is also practiced by mountain lions.

Bobcats do most of their hunting in low-light conditions, making them crepuscular, dawn to dusk hunters.

Normally they prowl around three hours before sunset to midnight, and again for an hour or so before sunrise, trying to sleep the days away in their dens.

During the colder and snowier months, bobcats will adjust their sleep times so they can spend more time tracking down prey in broad daylight.

Don't try and outrun a bobcat, as they can sprint over 30 mph. What might surprise you is their ability to jump, able to clear 12 feet in a single bound. A 6-foot fence is nothing for them to clear.

They are also excellent tree climbers, heading to the trees when in danger or to look for birds in nests. They will also pounce on the backs of deer from trees.

These critters make a wide variety of sounds, from hisses, snarls and meows, to screams. When mating season comes

around, the cats emit a screaming cry known as a caterwaul, in an attempt to attract a mate. The sound is very loud and can travel over a mile.

Because bobcats are solitary, breeding is the only time they will interact. Breeding season is generally December until April, with a litter being born in August or September.

The litter size is usually two or three kittens, and sometimes up to six.

Occasionally a female may have two litters a year, but the kittens from both litters will stay with her throughout the first winter.

There has been hybridization between the lynx and bobcat on rare occasion. The two may cross paths in the wild and usually the encounter is violent.

Sometimes the encounter can turn amorous, and a handful of hybrids have turned up over the past 15 years. They call these hybrids a blynx.

President Coolidge was once given a bobcat as a pet by the Great Smoky

Mountains Association. Silent Cal wanted nothing to do with that snarling, spitting bundle of dynamite, but for political reasons, he had to accept it.

The cat, named Smoky, lived at the White House for a time, until Coolidge handed him off to a zoo.

It is estimated that 12,000 bobcats take up residency in Colorado. Colorado is seeing more and more human-bobcat interactions. Habitat availability and a decrease in prey density in their natural ranges as the biggest reasons for more sightings, especially in the urban areas.

Bobcats are generally doing well across their range, except in Mexico, where he is becoming scarce.

Florida bobcats are very threatened since the Burmese python epidemic has hit. The number of bobcat sightings in the Everglades has fallen by 87.5%.

All of my bobcat sightings have been chance encounters, doing something else and suddenly, there he is. You have to look very closely to see one of these guys because he does not want to be seen.

If you have seen one in the wild, you are a lucky person. If not, keep looking, he is out there watching you.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and 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.

BLM Tres Rios Field Office plans winter prescribed pile burning on public lands

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Bureau of Land Management Southwest District plans to burn slash piles on public lands managed by BLM at several locations in the Tres Rios Field Office as conditions allow throughout the winter.

Slash piles are from previous treatments that were conducted on the Southwest

District to reduce hazardous fuels to protect wildland-urban interface communities by providing defensible space adjacent to private property and removing invasive species to restore forest health.

Prescribed pile burning locations include:

Dawson Draw Piles, 15 miles northeast of Dove Creek; West Dolores Rim

Piles, six miles east of Dove Creek and Highway 491; Summit Lake Piles, south of Highway 184 between Dolores and Mancos; Grandview Piles, two miles southeast of Durango and one to two miles north and west of Mercy Medical Center in the Grandview and three Springs area.

The prescribed pile burning may take mul-

tiple days to complete once initiated and will be monitored throughout the process to ensure public safety.

While smoke may be visible in the area at times, most of the smoke will lift and dissipate during the warmest parts of the day. A detailed burn plan outlines the parameters for prescribed burns.

The BLM obtained smoke permits from the Colorado State Air Pollution Control Division, which identify atmospheric conditions under which the burns can be implemented. Prescribed fire smoke may affect your health.

For more information, visit <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/wood-smoke-and-health>.



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