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# Bobcats

If you are an outdoor enthusiast or live near open space, you have likely seen a bobcat. Local residents often see them reclining on their deck, roof, or in the yard. These elusive animals can peacefully coexist with humans in wildland urban interface areas. While many people like to observe these seemingly peaceful felines, they are predators and can kill small pets, poultry, and livestock. As with any wildlife species, understanding their habitat needs and behavior can help you avoid conflicts.

The bobcat (*Felis rufus* or *Lynx rufus*) is common throughout Arizona at all elevations, especially in rimrock and chaparral areas. They are generally seen alone, but groups may consist of mating pairs, siblings, or mothers with kittens. The bobcat is two to three times the size of the domestic cat and appears more muscular and fuller in the body. Also, the bobcat's hind legs are proportionately longer to its front legs than those of the domestic cat. In Arizona, their coats are often tan with dark spots (they can be darker in wooded and brushy areas). They have a short tail with the end having black on the top side and a white tip.

Bobcats do not form lasting pair bonds. Female bobcats reach sexual maturity within their first year but males are not sexually mature until their second year. Breeding usually occurs between February and March, but the breeding season may be affected by latitude, altitude, and longitude, as well as by characteristics of each bobcat population. The bobcat's gestation period ranges from 50 to 70 days, averaging 62 days. In Arizona, litters often consist of two to three kittens that are usually born between April and early June.

Bobcat kittens stay with their mother between 7 and 12 months. Although young bobcats grow very quickly during their first 6 months, males may not be fully grown until 1½ years and females until 2 years of age. Bobcats can live for up to 12 years in the wild and will defend a territory of one to 12 square miles. Females and yearlings with newly established territories tend to have smaller and more exclusive ranges than males. Females also tend to use all parts of their range more intensively than adult males.

Bobcats may visit an area to find food, water, shelter, or the space they need to live. Food may include birds, rodents, rabbits, small unattended pets, poultry or other domestic birds, and other small livestock. Water in pools, birdbaths, fountains, and pets' water dishes can attract bobcats. Shelter for bobcats can include rooftops, attics, and the space underneath decks. Other small spaces can also make attractive dens and bobcats will sometimes rest during the day or bask in the sun. This makes them attracted to thick brush, shade, and unoccupied yards.

If you see a bobcat near your home, there is no need to panic. In many cases, they can be scared off with loud noises or spray with a garden hose. Small pets need to be protected from bobcats and other predators. Domestic birds should be kept in an enclosed area with a sturdy roof (a 6-foot tall fence is not necessarily good protection), and do not spread seed that attracts other wildlife. Do not feed bobcats, as this can encourage them to become too comfortable around humans. Bobcats rarely attack people. However, if a bobcat does act aggressively towards a human, it may have rabies. If a bobcat is behaving unusually, contact the Arizona Game and Fish Department, or your local Animal Control Officer.



Bobcat *Lynx rufus* . Photo by USDA Forest Service - Southern Research Station , USDA Forest Service, SRS, Bugwood.org

*April 1, 2023*

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