

The Resilient Bobcat

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Resiliency is not a luxury that many species of wildlife possess. For example, the gopher tortoise needs a specific type of plant community to survive and reproduce. This is true with many species, which is the reason that the “endangered” and “extinct” status exist. Once their habitat is destroyed, they have no where else to go. However, there are those few fortunate species that can survive just about anywhere under most circumstances. Bobcats are in this category. Although they have been hunted by mankind throughout history and their habitats destroyed, they continue to survive.

Bobcats have been around for a long time. In fact, it is said that they were roaming around in the Irvingtonian stage, which was about 1.8 million years ago. (Wikipedia) They are members of the cat family Felidae. They can be found as far north as Canada and as far south as Mexico. They inhabit most states in the U.S. and are not particular about the plant community they live in. Bobcats can adapt to semi-desert areas, swamplands, woods and can even survive near urban populations.

As far as diet, their favorite meal is rabbit, but they will eat just about anything. Bobcats will munch on bugs or small rodents if other food is scarce. One of the most fascinating things about this cat is that although it is not large in size, it has been known to take down deer. This amazing creature may go long periods without eating. Once it finds available prey, it will eat heavily. If food is scarce, the cat may attack a larger animal and return time and again to feast on the carcass. Bobcats stalk their prey and pounce once they get close enough to the unfortunate creature. Being adaptable to different types of ecosystems as well as food may be the reasons that this creature has survived and thrived for so long.

Bobcats are beautiful creatures. They are grayish brown in color and are marked with spots on their bodies, which act as camouflage. They are about twice the size of a normal house cat. Like other felines, they have a whiskered face and yellow cat eyes. The black-tufted, pointed ears, distinctive black bars on the forelegs and stubby tail are features that make this species unique. The lips, chin and underparts of the cat are an off-white color. These creatures may vary in lightness or darkness according to their environment. For example, if the bobcat is found in a desert region it will be lighter in color than one located in the forest. Kittens are born with spots with wide-looking faces due to the tufts of hair under their ears.

The bobcat has sharp hearing as well as an excellent sense of smell. Being in the cat family, the round, black pupils of their eyes widen when it's dark, maximizing their light reception. Bobcats are generally on the move a few hours before sunset until around midnight. Then they rest a while and get up and prowl around before dawn until a few hours after the sun rises. They travel from two to seven miles on their route within their territory. The size of the region they travel in depends on gender of the cat and availability of prey. They mark their areas with feces, urine and claw marks on trees. Within their territory the feline will generally have a main den and several auxiliary shelters near the outer boundaries. These additional shelters can be hollow logs, thickets, brush piles and under rock ledges.

Bobcats usually live about six to eight years in the wild, although in captivity, may survive as long as 32 years. As adults, they don't have too many natural enemies other than mankind. Occasionally, out west, cougars and gray wolves may kill bobcats, but here in Florida, not much bothers them. When they are young and defenseless however, eagles, owls, foxes and even other male bobcats are a threat.

Even though these animals are very adaptable, in some areas they are in trouble. For example, Ohio, Indiana and New Jersey don't have the benefit of having an abundance of these beautiful creatures and they are considered endangered in those states. The main cause of this status is attributed to over hunting and trapping. These beautiful cats have been hunted for centuries for their beautiful fur. Some hunters enjoy killing them for the sport. Habitat destruction is another cause for their decline in certain areas. Although they are resilient creatures, they do need someplace to hunt and breed.

Steps have been and are currently being taken to ensure the bobcat's future. In an effort to protect these creatures in the areas where they most need it, many agencies are working together to collar and track them to gain valuable information such as their movements and which habitats are most important to their survival. Once equipped with this vital data, biologists will be able to create a protection plan and management strategy that will assist these magnificent animals in their efforts to survive.

Even though the bobcat is considered the most common wildcat in North America, there is nothing "common" about it. These interesting cats are a vital part of the food chain, increase diversity in our wild areas and add to the excitement and beauty of nature for anyone fortunate enough to glimpse one in the wild.