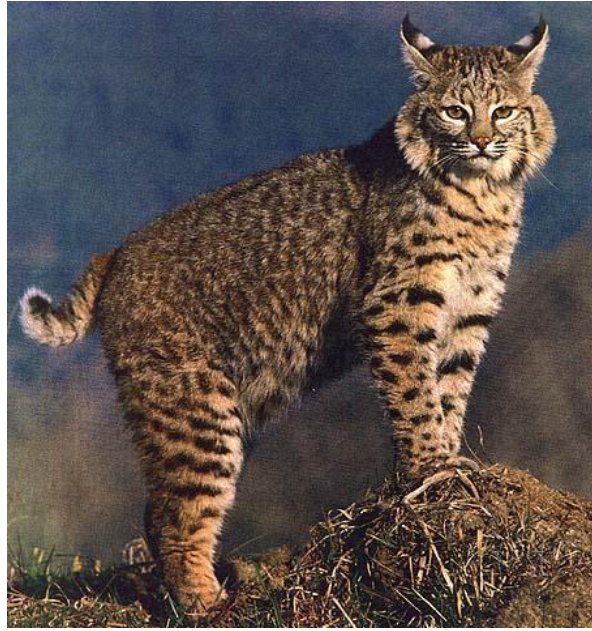


BOBCAT *Lynx rufus*



North America is the host to three kinds of wild cats: the cougar, bobcat and lynx. The bobcat makes its' home in the warmer climate of southern North America, and is named for its short 'bobbed' tail.

Characteristics

Bobcats are about double the size of a housecat, but with a much shorter tail. Their fur is soft and a brownish-reddish colour with black spots and lighter on the belly. Bobcats have ear-tufts though not as long as lynx. They measure 60 cm (2 feet) tall and up to 1.2 metres long (4 feet) and weigh about 12 kgs (26 lbs). The male and female are similar in appearance but the male cat is slightly larger.

Habitat & Behaviour

Bobcats live in habitats, which provide them with food and shelter. These areas include swamps, canyons and densely wooded areas. They designate their home in interesting way. Their personal territory is outlined by piles of dirt and leaves. The bobcat then sprays urine which keeps other wild cats away. Because bobcats hunt at night and sleep during the day, they are rarely seen.

Bobcats can live in a variety of habitats and have a variety of prey. Bobcats are exceptionally proficient hunters. Their sharp teeth and claws and acute good vision aid them in their hunting. They prey upon smaller animals and are true carnivores because of their high protein diet. Smaller animals include hares, rabbits, mice, squirrels, voles and birds. Deer fawns present an opportunity for larger prey. Bobcats are expert stalkers, that will get as close as possible to prey before they pounce. With bird prey such as grouse, they approach silently then quickly explode into action often catching the bird in mid-flight.

Bobcats have litters when they are two years old in spring. After a gestation period of two months, the mother bobcat takes all responsibility for the care of the kittens. The family lives in trees, ledges and caves. The kittens (a litter can be as many as 2-6) are nursed until they are two months old. By the time they are six months old, they are hunting with their mother. At the age of one year they are independent and are on their own.

Threats

Few predators actively hunt bobcat, however wolves, cougar and golden eagles are natural enemies. In some parts of their range, bobcat may compete with coyote, wolverine and lynx. However as with all wildlife, human disturbance and destruction to the environment is the major threat faced by bobcats. Bobcats can adapt to slightly altered areas however they prefer intact habitat for prey, water and shelter. Habitat destruction and toxins in the environment can greatly affect the health of bobcat populations. In addition, traps set for other species can cause injuries or death to individual bobcats.

Other Interesting Facts

- Bobcats are named for their short 'bobbed' tail.
- Their scientific species name 'rufus' applies to their reddish colouration. This also helps distinguish the bobcat's appearance from the closely related lynx, which often has slate grey fur.
- Bobcats are actually shown to have biological rank over lynx. Meaning that in rare encounters the bobcat's ferocity dominates the rather shy lynx.
- Bobcats are a strictly North American species and are not found on other continents.
- Bobcats like all wildcats have excellent night vision.