

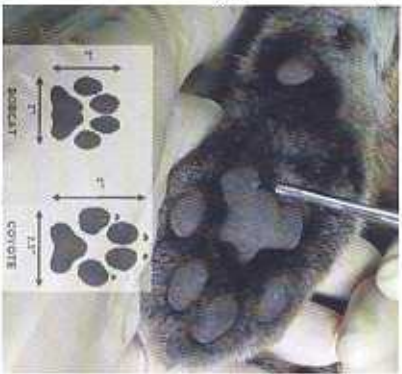
## Bobcat Description and Distinguishing Characteristics



Bobcats are medium-sized carnivores with males (25 pounds) being larger than females (17 pounds). They stand about 18 inches at the shoulder.

Bobcats get their name from the short "bobbed" tail (5-6 inches) and can be recognized by the facial ruff and short ear tufts. Fur color ranges from gray to reddish brown with white on their undersides. Bobcats typically have black spots present on their undersides, although the presence of spotting on the rest of their body is variable. They have white spots on the back of their ears.

Bobcats are rarely seen because they are active between dusk and dawn, but signs such as tracks, are good indicators of their presence.



Bobcat tracks are round in shape, measuring approximately 2 by 2 inches. Generally, bobcat tracks can be recognized by the shape of the print: the lack of claw marks (because they have retractable claws) and the "M" shaped palm pad (with two lobes on front and three lobes on the rear). Bobcat tracks sometimes are confused with dog tracks. Dog tracks typically are longer than they are wide, are diamond shaped (with two outside toes "below" the front toes), show claw marks, and have a triangular palm pad (with a single lobe on front and a double lobe on the rear).

Female bobcats older than one year will become pregnant once per year with a single litter of 3 to 4 kittens. Den sites of bobcats are moved by the females several times during the rearing period and consist mostly of rock shelters or dense piles of brush. During the breeding season, males travel widely and may breed with more than one female. Kittens and yearlings are more vulnerable to mortality due to dispersal movements and inexperience. Adults may live to age 3-5, although animals as old as 10 years may be found.

## Bobcat FAQ's



- Q. Why have bobcat numbers in Iowa increased in recent years?  
R. Iowa bobcats have a healthy reproductive and survival rate and the population could be naturally growing from within. Bobcats have also become more abundant in adjacent states and they could be dispersing into Iowa. We are conducting research to determine how the combination of these factors influences the growth rate.
- Q. Will population dynamics of bobcats change if there is a trapping season?  
R. Based on current population estimates, the bobcat population will increase or maintain current numbers given a trapping season.
- Q. Does the DNR receive complaints/concerns about bobcats in Iowa?  
R. No, there have been essentially no complaints about bobcats, although people often ask whether they will reduce game populations or attack livestock. Our research on diet revealed very little evidence of deer, turkeys or pheasants and no evidence of livestock like chickens or lambs. In other states, the impact of bobcats on game or livestock is also reported as minimal.
- Q. How is the Bobcat Project funded?  
R. This project is supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service State Wildlife Grant program and matching funds from the DNR and Iowa State University.
- Q. Why is data from bow hunters utilized by the project?  
R. A sample of bow hunters were selected to record their observations of bobcats and other "difficult-to-survey" wildlife while they were hunting deer. This survey provides a means to systematically document statewide distribution. Each year since 2004, approximately 1,500 response were received from bow hunters throughout Iowa. From these results, it is estimated that a bow hunter would need to be in their deer stand for approximately 150 hours in order to see a bobcat in Southern Iowa.
- Q. Why do we want to trap and hunt furbearers, such as bobcats?  
R. "To conserve and enhance our natural resources..." is the foundation of the Iowa DNR's mission statement, which guides furbearer management in Iowa. Seasons are set within broad biological parameters providing maximum recreational opportunity while sustaining the resource. Harvest of furbearers provides hunters and trappers recreational opportunities with a natural and renewable resource that can be harvested at sustainable

Bobcat Project Website — <http://www.ecoib.istate.edu/faculty/Clark.Walsh/bobcat.html>



## History

Managing and restoring carnivore populations is one of the most challenging ecological and socio-logical problems facing wildlife biologists today. People often view predators as either positive indicators of healthy ecosystems or as pests that create conflicts with livestock and other wildlife.



Adult female bobcat (No. 120)

A current species of interest by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), which has become increasingly common during the last 15 years.

Historically, bobcats were found throughout Iowa, but they had nearly disappeared due to large-scale habitat loss and unregulated harvest that occurred during the century of settlement. Although widespread in forested regions of North America, bobcats were listed as Endangered in Iowa in 1977. Increased sightings, incidental captures, and roadkills during the 1990's led the Iowa DNR to change the bobcat status to Protected in 2003.

*In 2003, the Iowa DNR, in cooperation with Iowa State University (ISU), initiated a research study on the status and ecology of bobcats in Iowa.*

## Objectives and Study Methods

The objective of the study is to understand the distribution and population dynamics of bobcats in Iowa. By understanding how bobcats use the habitat and landscape of Iowa, how they disperse, and how they are genetically linked to bobcat populations in surrounding states, we can make scientifically based management decisions for effective conservation of bobcats in Iowa.

Data is collected from three sources:

- live-captured bobcats that are radio-collared and released back at the site where they were captured
- carcasses of dead bobcats that are the result of automobile collisions and incidental trapping
- reports of bobcat sightings from bow hunters and the general public.

The public can help by reporting sightings or observed auto-killed bobcats by calling the bobcat hotline at 641-203-0006 or their local conservation officer or DNR personnel. Trappers in south central Iowa are critical in the success of this study, since most radio-collared bobcats come from accidental captures. We encourage all trappers in south central Iowa to call the hotline if they accidentally capture a bobcat.

When a bobcat is accidentally captured in the research study area, we proceed immediately to the location to anesthetize the captured bobcat and radio collar the bobcat. Information such as measurement and age are collected, as well as genetic samples.



## Project Results to Date

- More than 550 bobcat carcasses have been collected from 37 counties in Iowa from 2003-2007. The carcasses are examined to determine pregnancy rates, litter sizes, dietary preference, age. In addition, tissue is collected for genetic analyses.
- To date, more than 120 bobcats have been captured and ear-tagged. Most of these captured bobcats were also radio-collared to monitor movements in south central Iowa.
- The bow hunter survey reliably indicates that bobcats are common across southern Iowa and sparsely distributed elsewhere in the state.
- Once they reach maturity at about 2 years of age, survival is fairly high (~80% annual) with most deaths caused by accidental trapping or automobile collision.
- Home ranges of adult male bobcats average about 22 square miles. Female home ranges average about 7 square miles during summer when they are with kittens but increase to 9 square miles in the winter.
- Core areas of activity are in forested blocks of habitat, often surrounded by grasslands including pastures and CRP. Bobcats rarely use row cropped agricultural land.
- The bobcat fall/winter diet most often includes rabbits (60%), mice and voles (20%), and squirrels (15%). Bobcats rarely take deer or birds.
- We have extracted DNA from hundreds of Iowa bobcats and are now working on samples from surrounding states to examine genetic relatedness of adjacent populations.

## What's Next?

While the information collected so far indicates that bobcats are doing well in southern Iowa, it is still unclear if they will be able to expand and persist in substantial numbers in the more highly agricultural landscapes of Iowa. Genetic data that we are now analyzing will explain how kinship is related to the landscape and whether the Iowa bobcat population is closely linked to bobcats from surrounding states. Continued research will help to explain the factors crashing bobcats to recolonize the Iowa landscape.

