

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**

Bobcats in Ohio

Native to the state, bobcats were common until overhunting and loss of habitat caused their demise in the 1800s. But sightings of them have increased since the 2000s because of laws regulating hunting and trapping and the reforestation of parts of the state. In 2024 they were removed from Ohio's Endangered Species List. Their population has grown since then. The ODNR reported 1465 sightings in 2024.



The bobcat, known as *Lynx rufus*, is believed to have evolved from the Eurasian lynx or the Canadian lynx. This wild animal gets its name from its short (bobbed) tail, about 6" long. Its usual color is a tawny yellow to reddish brown, but it changes to more gray in winter. Its spotted fur contains stripes or bar markings as well. Bobcats weigh between 9 - 38 pounds, are 18" to 50" long and 12" to 20" tall. Their ears are pointed with short black tufts. Females are smaller than males. Their footpads are bare and tracks are round and composed of 4 toes and a rear palm pad. The underside of their tail is white, as are two spots on the back tips of their ears – a useful adaptation for litters trying to locate their mothers. Their lifespan is between 5 and 15 years.

Adaptable mammals, they can live in many habitats including forests, swamps, and semi-deserts. They mark their territory with scents – from feces to anal gland secretions as well as visually – by scraping trees or the ground. This minimizes confrontations with other bobcats. Their mating season is winter, and litters are born after 62 days. Usually, their territory has several places to shelter, including a main den and other small hiding places like hollow logs, ledges, or brush piles.

Bobcats are crepuscular, meaning they are most active between dusk and midnight and then from pre-dawn hours until 3 hours after sunrise. They hunt and eat then and spend daylight hours resting. These animals are solitary by nature and possess the ability to endure extended periods without food. To catch prey, bobcats stalk - which requires slow movement, staying close to the ground, being quiet and getting as close as possible to the quarry as possible. Then they ambush and kill it by sinking their canine teeth into the animal's neck, cutting the spinal cord. Their favorite food source is rabbits, but they will eat opossums, moles, shrews, raccoons, domestic cats, woodchucks, foxes, porcupines, skunks, birds, and reptiles. On occasion, if the dead prey is large (e.g. a small deer), they will cache it and return to feed on it for sustenance over time.

Reproduction starts with the mating season and culminates in spring with litters of usually 2-4 kittens. The female raises the young alone. She nurses them until they are 2 months old, and cleans, feeds, and protects them as they develop. Males take no part in their upbringing. The mothers teach their offspring to hunt and remain with them until they are about a year old.

Bobcats have some remarkable traits. They are excellent climbers and can run up to 30 miles per hour. They place their back feet in the same spots where their front feet have stepped to reduce noise when hunting. Their claws are retractable, which increases their speed. Bobcats can mew like domestic cats, but normally they chortle or chirp to communicate. They also have sharp hearing, excellent vision, incredible patience, and are proficient climbers. They use these skills to hunt and escape predators. If cornered, they fight fiercely, emitting growls, hisses, spits, and snarls. Bobcats are elusive and keep to their own defined territories.

Bobcats have adapted to different environments throughout the United States. Though previously endangered, they are making a comeback in this state. They have evolved and learned to cope with varying geographies. Their lore and reputation as distinctive animals has grown. For centuries, folklore and stories about bobcats were shared amongst Native American tribes. At Ohio University in Athens, the mascot is Rufus the Bobcat. And locally within the last few years, the Grand Valley Preserve Manager saw one. Such a sighting was rare, and bobcats may be uncommon here, but their presence is on the rise.