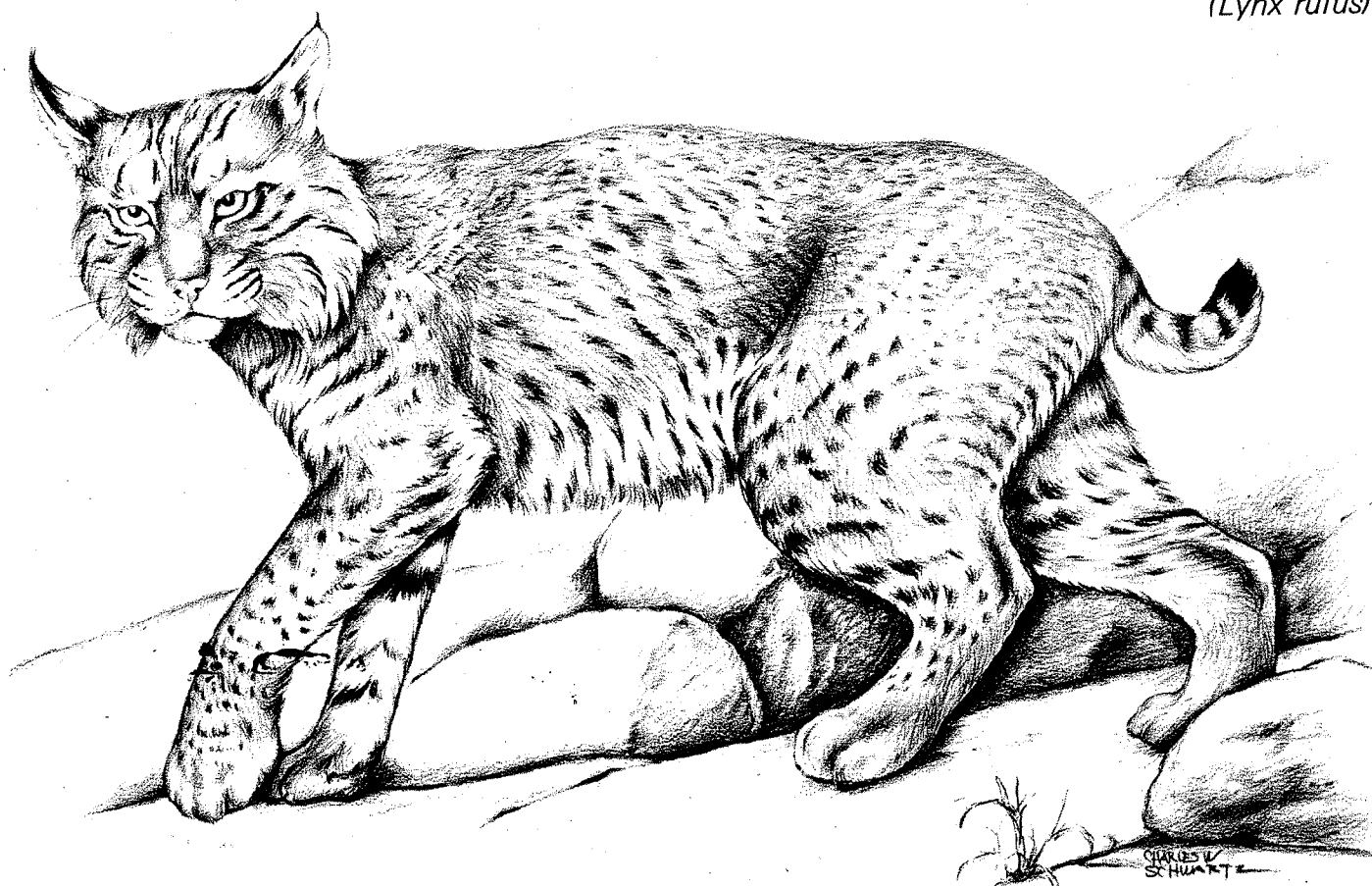


# Bobcat

(*Lynx rufus*)



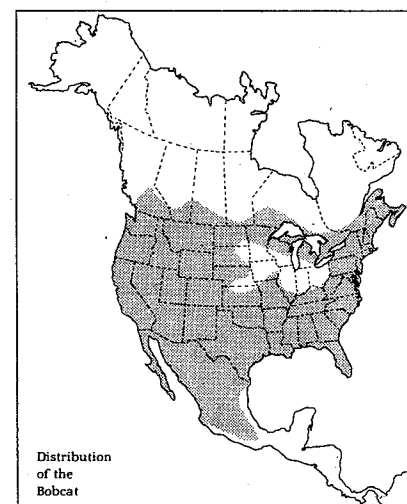
The bobcat is a member of the Cat Family which also includes lions, leopards, tigers, pumas, lynxes, ocelots, jaguars, cheetahs and servals. The common name refers to the short or bobbed tail.

**Description.** The predominant color is yellowish to reddish brown, streaked and spotted with black. Although the bobcat is only a medium-sized member of the Cat Family, it is one of the largest wild mammals in Missouri. Its total length ranges from 22½-50 inches (571-1,270 mm), and its weight from 10-40 pounds (4.5-18.1 kg). The bobcat is

distinguished from the domestic cat, which sometimes lives in the wild, by its distinctive color pattern, larger size, proportionately longer legs, much shorter tail, and 28 teeth.

In the wild, bobcats may live to 10 or 12 years of age and in captivity up to 25 years. They have a very strong odor which is characteristic of their dens.

Bobcats are generally quiet but may give high-pitched screams or low growls. During the breeding season when they are more vociferous than at other times, their caterwauling consists of squalls, howls, meows and yowls. When captured, they growl, hiss and spit.



This series is abstracted from the revised edition of *The Wild Mammals of Missouri* by Charles and Elizabeth Schwartz. For more detailed information about this species and other mammals in Missouri, refer to this book. Your school library may have it or can borrow it for you from the inter-library loan service. This book can be purchased from the University of Missouri Press, P.O. Box 1644, Columbia, MO 65211, or the Missouri Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102.

## Missouri Mammals

This project funded by the 1/8 of 1% conservation sales tax.

© 1981 Missouri Conservation Commission



**Distribution and abundance.** In Missouri, bobcats live primarily in the Ozark Highland and in the Mississippi Lowland where they are sparse.

Scattered populations occur along the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and in northern Missouri. In the Missouri Ozarks, the estimate is one bobcat per six square miles (9.6 square km). In recent years, the bobcat has been extirpated from much of its former range in the central United States.

**Habitat and home.** The bobcat lives in heavy forest cover, preferably second-growth timber with much underbrush, broken with clearings, rocky outcrops and bluffs, and in timbered swamps. During most of the year, a fresh rest shelter such as a thicket, standing or fallen hollow tree, or a recess in a rocky cliff is used each day. In the breeding season, similar but usually more inaccessible places are chosen for a den. The nest is made of dried leaves and soft moss.

**Habits.** In Missouri, males have an annual home range of 18-28 square miles (28.8-44.8 square km) while females have smaller ones. Within these home ranges, individuals may travel 3-7 miles (4.8-11.2 km) a night. The home range is marked by scent places containing droppings or urine.

Bobcats are curious and investigate many objects along their way, which accounts for their customary zigzag trail. They usually walk, trot or take leaps 7-10 feet (2-3 m) long.

In locating prey, a bobcat depends more upon its keen eyesight

and hearing than its sense of smell. When stalking, it usually creeps stealthily along, then pounces on its prey; or it may crouch on a game trail or tree limb and await an unwary victim. Bobcats can kill animals as large as deer by biting the throat at the jugular vein.

Bobcats are both nocturnal and diurnal, but most hunting occurs around sunrise and sunset. They are active all year. However, they often remain in a resting place during a storm and avoid deep, soft snow because of difficulty walking in it. Bobcats are capable of swimming and readily cross streams. They are good climbers and take to trees as a refuge from dogs, or for resting or observation. They often stretch against some hard snag to sharpen their front claws, much in the manner of domestic cats.

**Foods.** A study of the food habits of 41 bobcats in Missouri showed the following foods and their percentages by volume: rabbits 67.0; mice, rats and shrews 0.7; squirrels 9.9; deer 8.6 (some of which is probably carrion); opossums 1.9; domestic cats 1.7; wild turkeys 7.9; quail 1.7; undetermined meat 0.5; and grasses 0.1.

Bobcats gorge when food is plentiful, and may not feed again for several days. They seldom return to feed on an old kill unless food is scarce. They waste considerable meat and kill more than they eat. They use their feet to bury any surplus food under snow or leaves.

**Reproduction.** Breeding begins in December and may extend into June. After a 50- to 70-day gestation

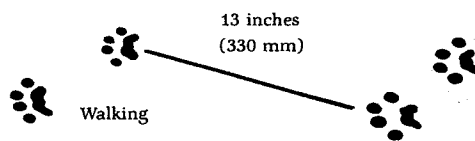
period, the litter of usually two or three young is born. Most litters arrive from mid-May to mid-June, but some are born as late as September or October.

At birth, each kitten weighs about 12 ounces (340 g) and measures 10 inches (254 mm) long. They have spotted fur and sharp claws. When about 9 to 11 days old, their eyes open. They soon come outside the den where they gambol and play, although they return inside to feed. Weaning occurs around 2 months of age, but the young stay with the female until fall or even later. Some females mate when 1 year old.

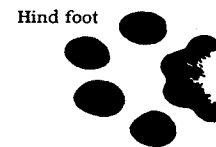
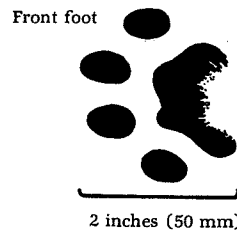
**Importance.** The bobcat hide provides strong leather, but the fur is brittle and wears poorly. In recent years, however, the demand for bobcat fur has increased due to the ban on importation of pelts of various cat species outside the United States. Where bobcats are common, hunting them with dogs furnishes considerable sport. The meat of young animals is reported to be sweet and tender. As predators and scavengers, bobcats play an important role in the wildlife community.

**Management.** The Missouri Department of Conservation maintains a close watch to determine whether and when a harvest can be taken safely.

Destructive individuals should be removed from an area by hunting or trapping. Unless causing heavy damage to man's interests, bobcats should be tolerated and regarded as part of a vanishing wilderness.



Bobcat tracks



Domestic Cat track