



Bobcats in New Jersey

Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) in New Jersey are uncommon and are rarely seen. Bobcats are found primarily in the northern counties of Morris, Passaic, Sussex, and Warren, though unconfirmed reports have also been received from the eastern, central, and southern counties. Bobcats are an endangered species in New Jersey. There is no open season on the species for trapping or hunting in New Jersey.

General Description

The bobcat is approximately twice the size of a domestic cat. Bobcats exhibit sexual dimorphism in size; with males approximately one-third larger than females. In addition, variations in weight and physical dimensions may be related to age, season, nutritional condition, and geographic location. Their average total length is 32.4–37.4 inches for males and 28.7–33.5 inches for females. Average tail lengths ranged from 5.2–6.3 inches for males and from 4.8–5.7 inches for females. Weights of adult males may range from about 20 to 60 pounds and average about 28 pounds, whereas weights of adult females have ranged from 14–34 pounds and average in the 15-to-20-pound range.

Habitat

Bobcats use different areas within their range, and how much they use these areas varies according to the areas vegetational and topographical features and the bobcat's food and shelter requirements. Bobcats are found to use areas with dense understory vegetation and high prey densities. Habitats frequently used are openings in hardwood forests, which resulted from farms, timber cuts, roads, and pipelines and which have dense growths of briars, vines, and grasses. These are used for hunting and daytime resting and include areas where hardwood timber harvesting recently occurred. Clear-cut areas less than 10 years old support higher numbers of eastern cottontails than mature forest stands, and these areas are also highly used by bobcats as are the earlier stages of successional hardwood growth and fallow fields near forested cover. Bobcats frequently use rock ledges and outcrops for diurnal retreats and as natal dens when available.

Reproduction

The peak of bobcat breeding is generally February through March. Gestation periods range from 50 to 70 days, with a mode of 62 days. Female bobcats are physiologically capable of

breeding at 9–12 months of age; males do not become sexually mature until about 1.5 years of age.

Diet

Cottontails are among the most common prey items consumed by bobcats. Bobcats are opportunistic feeders and feed heavily on rodents, squirrels, chipmunks, groundhogs, voles, mice, and shrews, dependent on prey availability. Virginia opossum, gallinaceous and passerine birds, and snakes are also prey. In other words, any mammal or bird that is catchable is food for a hungry bobcat.