



Article & Photo by Margie Manthey and published in the Westport Review Mirror, 2020



Recently, there have been a few bobcat sightings around Wolfe and Devil Lakes. Although bobcats inhabit much of North America, we rarely get to see them because of their nocturnal habits and elusive nature. They adapt well to many types of habitats, including forests, swamps, mountains, brush land and deserts, and sleep inside secretive dens in rock crevices, hollow trees and thickets. They are good climbers, but spend most of their time on the ground. Differing a bit by region in size and appearance, most bobcats are roughly twice the size of an average house cat and weigh between 8 - 35 lbs. / 3.6 - 15.8 kgs. Males are larger than females. They are varying shades of brown with a white belly and often wear a heavy pattern of dark spots and stripes across their body and legs. Like their larger relative, the Canada lynx, bobcats have tufted ears, long legs and big paws with retractable claws. They are named for their “bobbed” black-tipped tails. Some people mistake bobcats for cougars, which are actually much larger and have very long, rope-like tails that brush the ground.

These athletic wildcats can jump up to 12 feet high and, like other carnivorous felines, are fierce hunters with sharp senses. They mainly predate on rabbits and hares, but also eat rodents, squirrels, raccoons, geese, reptiles and insects. Skunks, foxes and mink -- and even fishers, which they compete with for food -- may be attacked and eaten, too. They also swim well and have been observed catching salmon. Bobcats are capable of killing animals larger than themselves and, less commonly, they may ambush a young or weakened deer. They cache uneaten meat from larger kills. Their willingness to hunt diverse prey separates bobcats from lynx, which almost exclusively hunt snowshoe hares. They employ a stalking technique to hunt larger prey and a pounce method for small animals. Victims are dispatched with a bite to the back of the neck. Every now and then, bobcats may wander into farmyards and attack smaller domesticated animals and poultry or small pets, but this is not typical behaviour. Adult bobcats are preyed upon by wolves and cougars, and juveniles are killed by coyotes and owls.

Bobcats are territorial animals. To deter interlopers, they mark their home range with claw marks, glandular scent, urine and scat. A male bobcat's optimal range will overlap with those of multiple females. The females are highly intolerant of other female trespassers, more so than males are of one another. Solitary and silent for most of the year, in late February, bobcats enter their polygamous mating season with noisy screeches, growls, hissing and yowls. Their hair-raising screams reportedly sound like a woman in distress. All this ungodly caterwauling is simply part of their breeding behaviour. After a gestation of about 62 days, 1-6 spotted, blind and adorable kittens are born in a secluded den. Young are raised solely by the females and remain with them for 8 - 11 months. Once they master hunting for themselves, the juveniles head off on their own, before the next litter of kittens arrive.

The average lifespan for wild bobcats is 7 years; but the record for the longest-lived wild bobcat is 16 years, and one captive animal lived for 32 years. In the 1970's, the fur trade obliterated their populations in some regions. Thankfully, protective regulations were put in place, and today, populations are stable. Bobcats rarely attack people. They are easily scared off, so if one attacks, it may have rabies.

Article: Margie Manthey/ Bobcat photo: Susan Creighton

