



Living with Bobcats

Females with Kittens

For human residents of the Greater Tucson or other urban areas seeing bobcat females with kittens taking up residence in their backyards can be a daunting experience. While the females that live on the urban/wildlands edge where development meets native desert typically select the highest, steepest, and most rugged areas to birth and raise their kittens, those that live in areas of heavy urbanization do not have that choice. They must find safe places at or near houses or other human-made structures where walls, roofs, and other structures take the place of rocks, caves, steep slopes, and rugged terrain.

Bobcat Females

All bobcat females are single mothers. The males do not help raise kittens. If an adult male encounters kittens or a bobcat family, he may try to kill kittens that are not his.



While bobcats can give birth any month of the year, most females, almost 80% in our study, had their kittens in April.

Fifty-seven percent of reproductive attempts were successful with at least one kitten surviving until it could travel with the female from the den. Females that lose their litters (23% in our study) most likely to predation, very quickly rebreed and attempt to raise a second litter. While females can have up to five kittens, one to three is the norm and they often lose part of the litter.

Bobcat females typically have their first litter at the age of two and reliably give birth and attempt to raise kittens every year. Over the course of their lifetime, they may give birth to several litters. Kittens are born helpless and relatively poorly developed. If a natural wild den is not available, the female will choose a place where she can keep the kittens hidden and safe to give birth. Just like domestic house cats, bobcat kittens are defenseless for the first six to eight weeks of life.

Bobcats do not routinely return to the same den or place on two consecutive days, instead moving from place to place throughout their home range. When kittens are born, the female begins returning to the same location repeatedly.

If you see a bobcat returning to your backyard or property day after day, consider the possibility that she has small kittens hidden there. Although females may hide kittens for their first six weeks at houses having an inside dog, it is very unusual for them to choose a backyard that includes a resident dog. If you think a female has kittens hidden, do not let your dog out in that area!



Living with Bobcats

Females with Kittens

Hans Huth



In 2023 and 2024, Bobcat #28, Avery, utilized the space behind the large water storage tank in a Tucson bobcat friendly backyard to keep her young kittens safe

While most of the time the female is away hunting, she returns to nurse and care for the kittens.

The walled backyard and proximity to human structures and presence acts as a safe place and nursery for the kittens by helping to dissuade predators such as coyotes, dogs, and male bobcats while she is away. If left undisturbed, the mother may keep the kittens in such a den for days or even several

weeks. This is the most dangerous time for kittens. If she decides they must be moved to another den, she will carry them one by one in her mouth, also a dangerous undertaking. Although kittens are weaned when they are about three months old, they are still unable to hunt for themselves for several more months.

During this time, the female hunts for them and herself. Female bobcats raising kittens reach their highest energy and water demands in June, one of the hottest and driest times of the year in the Arizona desert.

Sharing Your Space

Chris Wesselman



K. McNerny



If possible, allow the female and her kittens to share your space for the days or weeks until she moves the kittens to another safe house. In doing this, you are helping her to successfully raise her family in a safe space. She will not cause harm to your property or create a mess, plus you will have the satisfaction of knowing you helped a resident family in their time of greatest need.

Those who welcome a bobcat family into their backyard are often treated with remarkable views of the female caring for, nursing, and playing with her kittens, something almost never viewed in a wild setting. Many bobcat friendly homes report the female leaving with the kittens when the kittens are large enough to climb the fence and follow her.



Living with Bobcats

Females with Kittens

Often the female and the kittens will return for an afternoon or day-long visit. Many residents report the same female returning in subsequent years with new litters of kittens.

Providing ground level water that is easily filled from the porch or near the outside door will benefit the female and kittens during hot temperatures.

Safety for People and Pets

It is an easy adjustment to provide a friendly environment for females raising kittens. Tucson's urban bobcats are not tame or habituated to humans. Since a bobcat will remain in the same territory or home range their entire adult life, humans become a common part of the urban bobcat's life. She is very aware of human activities and will often move the kittens if she perceives that you know she is there. In many cases, maintaining direct eye contact with her from a doorway is enough to encourage her to move the kittens. While rarely aggressive towards humans, an animal of any kind, including bobcats, will defend itself if it feels cornered. **Avoid going out into the backyard as much as possible.** If you come upon the female by surprise, slowly back away and return to the house. If you need to go into the backyard and the kittens are out, make noise and they will usually retreat to their safe and hidden spot.

Pet owners should always leash their animals when entering and leaving the house and use doorways that do not access the backyard. Do not "sic" a dog on the female, spray her with a hose or attempt to chase her away. Remember, she has chosen your backyard as a safe place to raise her kittens.

Relocating Bobcats

Relocating a female bobcat with kittens is likely a death sentence for small kittens and perhaps the female too. She and the kittens are taken from their home range which she knows very well, and dropped off in an unfamiliar area. Bobcat females do not share their home range with other females except sometimes with adult daughters. Our research showed that home ranges "fit together like puzzle pieces" with little overlap. A relocated female will invariably encounter the resident female or males. Conflict is inevitable at which point she may try to return to her home range with the kittens. It is highly unlikely that the kittens and possibly the female will survive such a journey.

The survival rate of kittens taken to a wildlife rehabilitation facility without their mother and later released is unknown. The kittens do not get the benefit of learning to hunt with the female or learn about other dangers. Bobcat mothers keep their kittens with them for 10 -11 months often until she is due to give birth to a new litter. During this time, the kittens benefit from the food provided by the mother and by learning important survival skills.



Celebrate Bobcats

The prevalence of bobcat females raising kittens in Tucson should be a community "Point of Pride". It is the result of years of careful land use planning that has preserved and protected the green spaces, travel ways, and native vegetation that provide high quality wildlife habitat for bobcats and other wildlife. It also reflects a philosophy of "peaceful coexistence" among the residents, two and four-legged, of our wonderful desert City.