



# *Living with Bobcats*

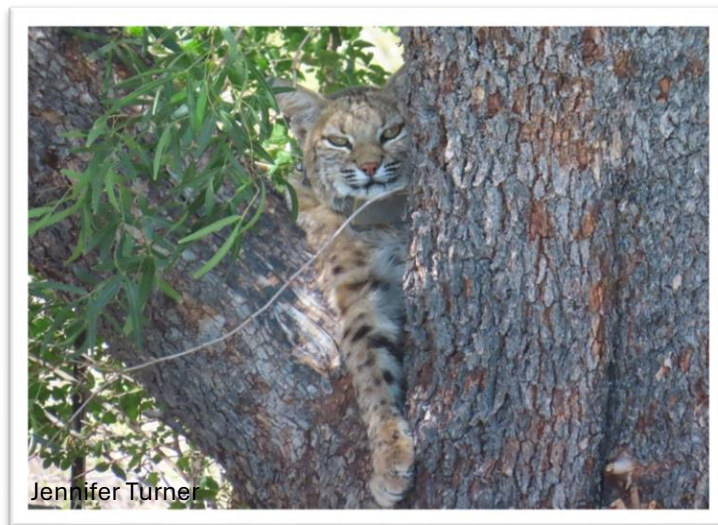
## Pets and Livestock

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Bobcats are common throughout Arizona at all elevations, especially in the Sonoran Desert, rimrock and chaparral areas and in the outskirts of urban areas where food is readily available. Bobcats are not considered a threat to human safety except in rare cases when they have rabies or are extremely aggressive.

Bobcats are generally seen alone, but groups may consist of mating pairs, siblings, or mothers with kittens. Bobcats are most active around sunset and sunrise. It is not uncommon to find one napping under a shrub in a brushy backyard. Individual bobcats defend a territory of one to 12 square miles. Female home ranges are usually not shared, except with kittens or adult daughters. Male home ranges are much larger and overlap. In Tucson, there may be an adult female and her offspring and up to three different males using the same area at different times.

If you see a bobcat near your home, there is no need to panic. Bobcats are not considered a threat to human safety except in rare cases when they have rabies or are cornered without an escape route. It is more likely that bobcats are attracted to your yard because of its abundant wildlife, domestic birds, water and shade or other shelter.



Bobcat #34 - Danielle lounges in a tree at a home in Tucson

Bobcats in native habitats use terrain such as rocks, caves, holes, steep slopes, and trees for cover and to escape from predators. Urban bobcats often do not have access to such habitat features. For an urban bobcat, man-made structures such as walls, roofs, crawl spaces, and hedges take the place of natural structures to provide hunting and escape cover.



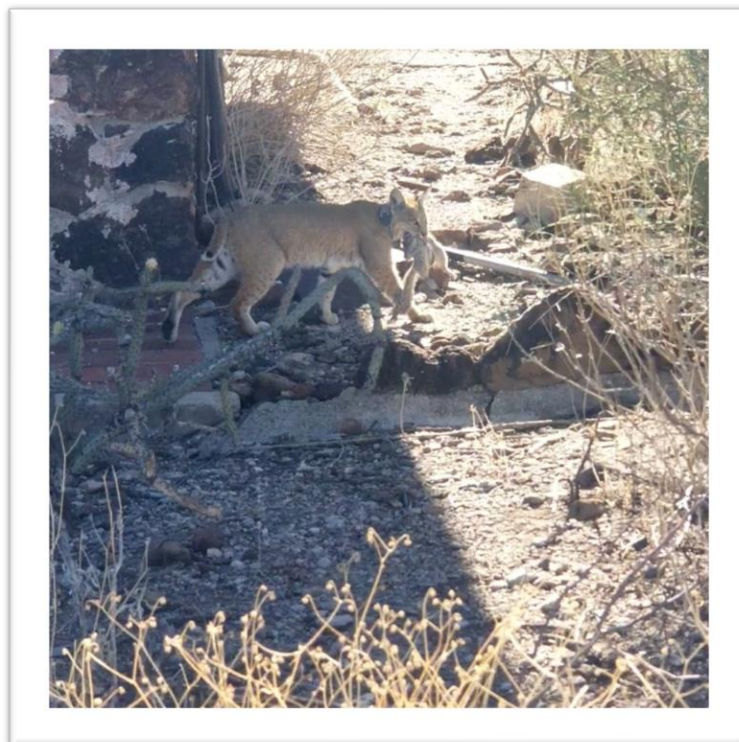
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### Understanding Bobcats

Bobcats do not understand or recognize boundaries placed by humans. Once settled into a home range,



Bobcat #12 - Margaret with a rock squirrel  
captured in her home range on Tumamoc Hill

a young bobcat will remain there throughout its life. It is his home. He does not have the option that we often do, of moving to a different or better area.

He also does not recognize the difference between urban livestock such as chickens or turkeys, and native prey such as mourning doves and cottontail rabbits. When humans place potential prey in the path and home of a bobcat, the outcome is very predictable. The bobcat is simply responding to thousands of generations of evolution that have made him an effective predator. Cats, including bobcats, are highly evolved obligate carnivores, meaning they only eat meat.

Since bobcats rarely eat food they did not kill, they are dependent on their hunting skills for their survival and that of their young. A bobcat cannot be expected to change his behavior because he happens upon chickens that, in our terms, are someone's property. To the bobcat, it is simply food. If he can easily access the chickens, he will.



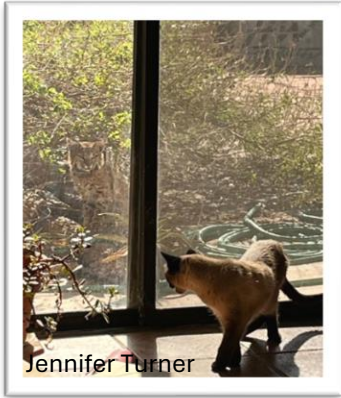
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### **Protecting Pets**

Bobcats do not aggressively destroy property or scavenge in garbage like some other urban species. It only takes small changes on the part of humans to live peacefully with these spectacular spotted cats. Domestic house cats and small dogs should not be allowed to roam outside unattended. In over 1,000 public reports of bobcat activity generated through the Bobcats in Tucson Research Project website ([bobcatsintucson.net](http://bobcatsintucson.net)) only two involved a pet being threatened. In both cases, this was a house cat that was outside.



House Cat Hazel safely views resident Bobcat  
#34 Danielle from behind a closed door

Food habits information collected as part of the Study showed that Tucson bobcats rely primarily on wild rabbits and birds as prey with less than 2% of their diet being cats, dogs, or chickens. However, most desert urban areas are predator-rich with high densities of coyotes which will routinely attack small unattended pets. Raccoons are also aggressive predators on small, penned livestock such as chickens, doves, or rabbits.

Bobcats, like most cats, do not like dogs. Given the opportunity, domestic dogs, coyotes and foxes will kill bobcat kittens. Therefore, females avoid canids as much as possible. Rarely in the Bobcats in Tucson study did females utilize homes with dogs, especially when raising kittens.

If you encounter a bobcat while walking your dog, do not allow your dog to lunge at or run toward the bobcat. Keep it under tight control with a leash. Either slowly back away or simply wait on the bobcat to leave. Make sure that you are not blocking its only escape route. Never “sic” your dog on a bobcat in your yard or on your property. All wild animals, including bobcats, will defend themselves if attacked by a dog or if they feel threatened.

### **PROTECTING LIVESTOCK**

If you choose to keep chickens and other livestock in an urban setting, they need to be kept in predator-safe housing. At no time should they be allowed to roam free-range, even in a walled backyard with you present. Bobcats and coyotes are skilled climbers and can easily scale a six-foot fence that is often part of their daily environment. If a predator is successful in obtaining prey, it will continue to return to the same site. If you see a bobcat or other predator near your chicken or livestock pen, making loud noises and maintaining direct eye contact will often encourage them to leave the area.



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**Know** - Eliminating the bobcat is not the answer. When we place chickens or other domestic livestock in the home range of a bobcat, it is our responsibility to ensure their safety. We cannot expect a bobcat to distinguish between wild and domestic animals. If you eliminate one bobcat, another will soon occupy the now vacant home range. Bobcats that are removed from their home range and re-located will either try and return, which often does not end well for the bobcat or come in conflict with the resident bobcats living in the area where they were relocated.

Urban predators such as raccoons are adept at “reaching into” a chicken pen or other livestock enclosure and trying to pull the chicken or other roosting bird out through the fence. Perches and roosts should be located at least one foot from the fenced or screened walls of the pen. A layer of chicken wire with squares no larger than one inch applied from the inside over top of the existing wire will help prevent this behavior.

Roofs must be sturdy and able to handle the weight of a bobcat who will often climb on top of the pen searching for a way to the birds inside.

Many of the wildlife species in our area create den sites by burrowing under structures. These include raccoons, foxes, rabbits and skunks. While bobcats will not generally dig under structures to access prey, they will take advantage of burrows created by other wildlife. Coyotes and domestic dogs will both actively try to dig into livestock enclosures.

To prevent bobcats and other predators from gaining access to your livestock housing, burying a screen below ground level to the depth of 12 inches is the optimal solution.

Dig out the area of concern and install an L-shaped screen into the bottom of the trench with the foot pointed outward. Anchor the screen to the structure along the top of the screen. Then backfill and level the trench. Use heavy gauge, galvanized wire mesh so the screen will resist rusting or degradation and will provide many years of protection.



A safe poultry enclosure



L-shaped screen prevents predator digging



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