

How to Avoid Incidental Take Of Canada Lynx

*While Trapping or Hunting
Bobcats and other Furbearers.*



The purpose of this information is to reduce injury and mortality to the Endangered Canada Lynx population caused by the hunting or trapping bobcats and/or other furbearers. Lynx and bobcat are similar in appearance and habits, and their ranges overlap with other furbearer species, and to some extent each other. Therefore, it is important for trappers and hunters to know how to distinguish lynx from bobcats, to recognize their preferred habitat types, and to avoid capturing or harvesting lynx. Trappers must also learn what to do if a lynx is caught incidentally.

Canada lynx

Current Status

The Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) was listed as an “endangered species” in Nova Scotia in the fall of 2002. As a result, lynx and their habitat are now protected under Nova Scotia’s *Endangered Species Act*. The harvesting of lynx is not permitted in Nova Scotia. Lynx may be encountered throughout the province, but the highlands of Cape Breton are where most lynx occur. The current lynx population on Cape Breton Island is estimated at between 100 and 200 animals.

Time is of the essence

Small localized wildlife populations, like the lynx on Cape Breton Island, are vulnerable and risk local extinction due to such things as starvation, habitat loss, and certain random events like disease, fire, and severe weather. We **must act now** if we are to ensure the future of the lynx on Cape Breton Island.

Recovery Efforts

In 2001, a Nova Scotia Marten and Lynx Recovery Team was formed, consisting of scientists and resource managers from the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Parks Canada, Natural Resources Canada (Canadian Forest Service), StoraEnso, and local universities. Unfortunately, not a lot is known about the lynx on Cape Breton Island and some basic questions still require better answers, including: How many animals are there? Where are they located? What type of habitat do they require for survival? Recovery activities are focussed on answering these questions, as well as on determining the genetic distinctiveness of the lynx on Cape Breton Island compared to other North American populations.

Stewardship is Key

Partnerships with local stakeholders—trappers, landowners, and forestry operators—are central in our efforts to recover this population. Due to the nature of the threats facing the lynx on Cape Breton Island, and because of the existing knowledge gaps, the information that you may have about lynx numbers and past and present distributions could be highly valuable in helping to direct recovery efforts. Also, local community support to help minimize accidental lynx deaths and further habitat degradation is crucial to ensuring the future of the lynx in Nova Scotia.

Threats to the Population

Causes of mortality in lynx populations include starvation, illegal trapping, loss of habitat, competition from other carnivores, inbreeding, emigration, vehicle strikes, diseases such as canine distemper, and predation. The loss of just a few individuals to a small lynx population could significantly impact the entire population.

Historically, the most significant threat to lynx populations was fur harvesting. In Nova Scotia the lynx-trapping season has been closed since 1975 and accidental captures of lynx in traps and snares legally set for other furbearers is reportedly small.

Other major threats are the loss and degradation of lynx and snowshoe hare habitat by forest insect invasions from species such as the spruce budworm, and improperly planned forest-harvesting practices. The presence and expansion of the bobcat and coyote populations on Cape Breton Island may also limit lynx population growth, due to increasing competition for prey and habitat.

Description

The Canada lynx is a medium-sized wild cat similar in appearance to its close relative the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*). Adult males of both species are usually larger than females. Lynx weights average 11 kilograms for males and 9 kilograms for females. Bobcat weights average 14 kilograms for males and 9 kilograms for females. Average lengths (from nose to tip of tail) are very similar for lynx and bobcats: 86 centimetres for males of both species, 81 centimetres for female lynx, and 79 centimetres for female bobcats.

Compared to the bobcat, the lynx has longer ear tufts, an entirely black-tipped tail, and a lighter, less-spotty coat with dense greyish-brown fur. The most distinctive features of the lynx are its long hind legs and large well-furred padded paws that allow the lynx to move swiftly through deep snow.

Bobcat pelts may be light grey, yellowish- or reddish-brown, to completely brown or buff. They are streaked or spotted with black or dark brown. The underside of the body is white with black spots and black bars on the fore legs. Lynx generally have more grey and less red in their pelts than bobcats and the belly fur is greyish-white or buff-white with mottled, indistinct black spots.

Lynx have ear tufts and facial ruffs on their cheeks that are larger and more conspicuous than those on bobcats. Ear tufts are usually longer than 2.5 centimetres on lynx and shorter than 2.5 centimetres on bobcats.



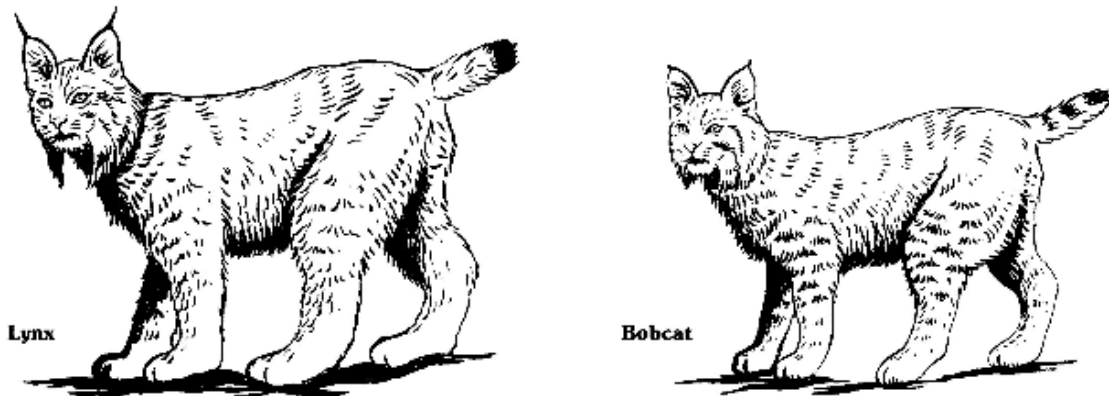
Ear of Canada lynx



Ear of bobcat

Bobcat and lynx tails are approximately 10-15 centimetres long and match their pelt colour except for the tip. The tip of the tail on bobcats is usually black on the upper side whereas on lynx the entire tip is black.

The hind legs of both bobcats and lynx are larger than their fore legs, which help them when springing to catch prey. However, the hind legs are even more disproportionately large on lynx than on bobcat, causing them to have a stooped appearance. Lynx also have much larger feet than bobcats. This gives them a “snow-shoe-like” advantage chasing prey in deep snow.



Comparison of lynx and bobcat. Note the difference in size, length of ear tufts, and banding on tail.

Sign

In snow, lynx tracks are generally less distinct than those of bobcat and often display a powder-puff appearance as a result of their abundant foot hair. In wet or compacted snow, lynx tracks will sometimes display smaller toe pads than are evident in bobcat tracks. Back feet often follow in the front foot tracks of both species. When walking, the stride (distance between footprints of the same foot) is 30-70 centimetres for lynx and 13-40 centimetres for bobcats. Both lynx and bobcat track trails tend to “wander” compared with the more straight-line patterns of wild canids (foxes and coyotes). Lynx and bobcats travel and hunt with a deliberate and methodical walking pattern, rarely bounding unless chasing prey



Belly Markings: Lynx (left), Bobcat (right)

Lynx spots are mottled. Bobcats have more distinct spots contrasted with whiter fur.



The tail of the Lynx appears much the same viewed the top or bottom. The lynx's tail tip (top left and bottom left) is completely black all around, while bobcat's tail shows black bars with a white tip when viewed from above (top right) and show a mostly white underside (bottom right).



Sign (con't)

Lynx tracks are approximately 7.5-9.5 centimetres long and 9-11.5 centimetres wide in dirt and up to 11.5 centimetres long and 12.5 centimetres wide in snow. Bobcat tracks are approximately 4.5-6.5 centimetres long and 4.5-6.5 centimetres wide in dirt and 6.5 centimetres long and 7 centimetres wide in snow. Both bobcats and lynx have 4 toe pads on the front and hind feet. Tracks from both species typically do not show claws as they do with canids. This gives the tracks a rounded appearance as opposed the more elliptical canid tracks.



Life History and Diet

Lynx normally breed during March-April. Litter sizes vary from 4 to 5 when prey is abundant to 2 to 3 when prey is scarce. Young lynx are independent by the age of 1, and by 2 years of age they have grown to full size and usually breed.

The snow hare is by far the most important prey item for lynx. Secondary prey species may include red squirrels and grouse. It is well documented that the availability of snowshoe hares largely regulates lynx abundance across most of their range.



Red Squirrel



Ruffed Grouse



Snowshoe Hare

Distribution and Habitat Preferences

The range of the lynx extends across the northern United States and throughout most of Canada. Once common throughout Nova Scotia, today lynx mainly exist on Cape Breton Island, with individuals occasionally showing up in other parts of the province. Additional northeastern populations of lynx are found in Newfoundland, Maine, the Quebec Gaspé and New Brunswick.

North American range
of the Canada lynx
(*Lynx canadensis*)

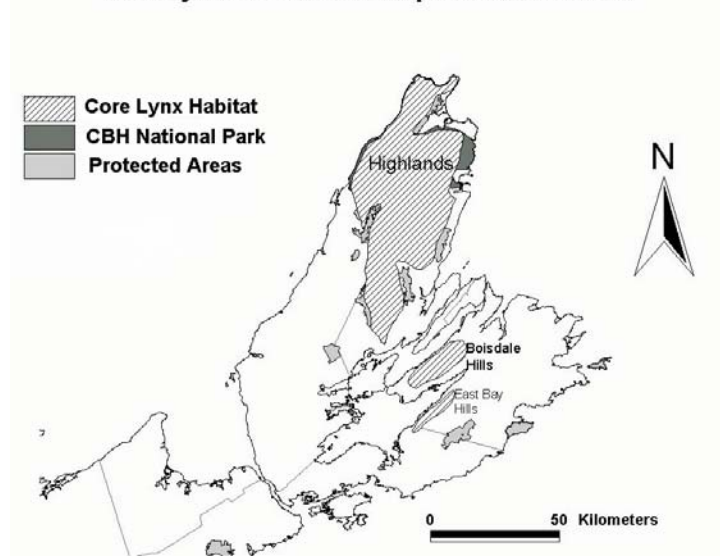


Habitat types preferred by lynx are variable, ranging from old-growth coniferous forests to regenerating coniferous or mixed forests. Forests that are growing back after fire or logging often provide excellent food and cover for hares, thus attracting lynx. Unlike bobcats, it is rare for lynx to be found in farmland habitats.

Bobcats are widely distributed across North America, and common throughout the southern Maritimes, though they may tend to avoid areas of dense human populations. Their northern distribution may be limited by snow depth.

Bobcats seem to prefer areas with high prey abundance and dense understory vegetation. Forest edges, rocky ledges and rocky outcrops are also important terrain features. Bobcats can thrive in a variety of habitats including dense old-growth forests, hardwood and hardwood-mixed forests, brushy habitats and farmland habitats.

Approximate current distribution of core lynx habitat on Cape Breton Island



Trapping Methods to Help Avoid Catching Lynx

To avoid catching lynx while trapping bobcats, trap sets should be made where bobcats are known to exist. Making trap sets near existing bobcat tracks is often successful because bobcats usually reuse the same travel patterns within their territories. Bobcats also tend to use areas where snowshoe hare are abundant. Trap set locations for bobcat that may avoid lynx include open meadows, pastures, and crop lands. Lynx rarely use agricultural lands and generally prefer to hunt and travel in forested or shrubby areas.

Trap sets, lures and baits that are effective for bobcats also appeal to lynx. Whenever a lynx track is identified, trap and snare sets should not be made in the vicinity. Visible baits of hare, beaver, or parts of hare and beaver should not be used if lynx might frequent the area. As well, flags or other suspended sight-attractants (bird wings, feathers, pieces of fur, etc.) should not be used near the traps if lynx are in the area.

Using a proper-sized foothold trap can reduce incidental captures of lynx. Traps smaller than number 3 help discriminate against lynx captures due to a relatively small trap-jaw spread compared to the foot size of lynx. However, these sized traps maintain excellent efficiency for bobcats (as well as foxes and coyotes).

Lynx often avoid traps set for foxes and coyotes when traps are placed in open fields. The use of tainted rather than fresh meat baits tends not to attract lynx while still remaining attractive to coyote and fox.

The typical walking behaviour of a lynx usually allows it to notice and avoid getting caught in snares. However, should lynx target bait sites or trap sets the best way to avoid accidental captures is to remove traps, snares and bait sites.

Bobcat Hunting Methods to Help Avoid Taking Lynx

Tracks should be closely examined and measured before any trailing dogs are released (see "Signs"). Any treed bobcat should be carefully identified and confirmed as not being a lynx before it is harvested. A treed lynx should be abandoned immediately with harnessed dogs in tow.

If predator calls are used in areas lynx frequent, it is essential to identify and confirm the species responding. Since it may be difficult, or impossible, to positively identify a moving or partially hidden animal, it is best not to shoot at all whenever identity is uncertain.

Reducing Mortality and Injury to Incidentally Captured Lynx

All trappers need access to a catchpole to allow safe release of any unintended animal captures. Care should be taken to approach any trapped animal slowly and quietly to minimize stress to, and agitation of the animal. A trapped lynx may allow the catchpole loop to be placed over its head, but it can be expected to react when the loop is tightened. Tighten the catchpole loop only sufficiently to restrain the lynx securely without disrupting its ability to breathe. It is important to keep the head of the lynx pinned to the

ground so that the front end of the body is restrained. Once the head is down, quickly place a foot, with light pressure only, on hindquarters to restrain rear legs. A heavy canvas, blanket, coat or tarp is also useful to protect the trapper from the cat's claws. Once the lynx is immobilized, the canvas or tarp can be placed over the prone animal to quiet it as the trap or snare is removed quickly. At this point the catchpole loop should be relaxed and removed to free the lynx. If a catchpole is not available, use a strong forked stick to pin the lynx's neck and shoulders to the ground while the trap is removed.

Never attempt to render a trapped lynx unconscious with a blow to the nose or head or by any other means. Striking the lynx may result in a life threatening injury to the animal.

Care should be taken at all times when releasing or handling a lynx as they are capable of injuring the trapper with their teeth or claws. Wearing thick gloves to release trapped animals is always wise.

If you need help releasing a lynx from a trap, please contact your local DNR office (Monday-Friday) for assistance, or 1-800-565-2224 evenings and weekends.

What you can do

- Learn about the Canada lynx.
- Inform and share your knowledge with others.
- Support lynx recovery efforts by reporting any lynx sightings, tracks, scats, and captures to your local DNR office, or to the Wildlife Division in Kentville, and by implementing the described avoidance methods.
- Carefully and immediately release any live lynx accidentally captured in traps, and inform the DNR right away.
- Fill out the accidental harvest form on the back of your licence if a lynx is trapped.
- Bring any lynx specimens, new or old, to your local DNR office.

For more information contact:

Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, Kentville
Tel: (902) 679-6091

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