

Wildlife Rehab Cathie Gregg

Bobcats

Bobcats in New Hampshire, or anywhere else for that matter, are elusive creatures. They are rarely seen and if you are lucky enough to catch a glimpse of one, you are sharing a moment with a truly beautiful and majestic wild animal. Late winter is about the only time that you will see two cats together. If you see two bobcats at the same time, or a double set of tracks, it doesn't necessarily mean that the population is growing, it simply means you are seeing a breeding pair. In summer, if you see tracks of a mother and kittens, you are truly blessed!

At Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife, we have been fortunate to care for 18 bobcats in 23 years. These animals are, in a word, awesome. Of those 23 animals, we have had three kittens and the remainder were mostly juveniles (under a year) with a handful of adults to round out the mix. By kittens, I mean spring born, admitted to us at a few months old, and too young to be released before fall. These youngsters come in weighing about five pounds and need to be wintered over and released the following spring. One kitten was found on a road in western New Hampshire and was so small that it was more than likely being moved by its mother, inadvertently separated from her by traffic and was unfortunately picked up by a motorist. If the animal had placed off to the side of the road, the mother would have retrieved her kitten. When admitted to us, this kitten was placed at a rehabilitation center in Maine which had a bobcat kitten the same age; the cubs were raised as a pair and soft released — meaning they were allowed to come back to a food station for back up food until they were on their own and no longer needed to return for support feeding.

The majority of our bobcats come to us in late December, at about 7-8 months of age. It is around this time that the inexperienced youngsters begin to show signs of getting into trouble; they are not as adept and skilled at hunting as the adults and can end up in chicken coops and barns looking for an easy dinner. We had one bobcat admitted from Bartlett which showed evidence of being shot several times; the fragments were lodged in the knee joint and after consulting with an orthopedic wildlife veterinarian, surgery was ruled out. We worked with this cat for eight months and finally

had to make the very difficult decision to euthanize her when arthritis became evident in the joint where the shot fragments were lodged. This is the bobcat that "Soul of the Mountains" was written for and it was put to music by Mike Muir and released on one of his albums. This became the signature song for Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife's education programs. In New Hampshire, bobcats are at the northern tip of their range and with our deep snows and their short legs, hunting is a chore. Their cousin, the lynx, is better equipped for harsh winters with their longer legs and snowshoe-like feet. When bobcats are admitted to Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife, they



are taken to our wildlife veterinarian and anesthetized for a physical exam. Teeth are checked, a weight is taken, the cat is checked for parasites, blood is drawn, if necessary, and the cat is microchipped. A pre-release exam is done before the cat is released back to the wild.

We have seen bobcats come in two color phases, tawny gold and gray and their patterns are striped with muted splashes of black. Several years ago we admitted a sister and brother, from Twin Mountain within several days of each other. The female was yellow and the male was gray. They were very different, in color and personality, and a very striking pair. The eyes are deep yellow or gold. The underneath of the cat is white with black or brown spots and the insides of the legs have black leg bars. The face is round with a disk or facial tufts. Although bobcats are solitary animals, these siblings were together at the center for the winter and released in the spring. In any winter when unrelated cats are admitted, they would not be housed together.



The average bobcat will weigh between 15 and 25 pounds with the male weighing more than the female. Some will go as high as 40 pounds and one bobcat in Jackson was a very hefty 52 pounds. Female bobcats have "territories" of anywhere from 5-15 square miles and the male has a larger "range" which extends into the area of several females. Territories of females may, but do not generally, overlap.

Breeding takes place anywhere from January to March with kittens born between April and May. Like domestic kittens, bobcats are born helpless with eyes and ears tightly closed. Young are content to nurse and stay close by their mother until the age of 3 weeks at which time they become curious and playful. It has been said that bobcats are second only to otter in playfulness. One bobcat at our center was observed on our cameras in the act of leaping in the air with pieces of food and tossing leaves around the pen. Kittens are weaned at about 8 weeks and begin hunting trips with their mother by mid-summer. Claws are retractable and signs of claw usage may be visible in mud, snow or ice.

Protected in some states and hunted in others, the bobcat faces an uncertain future. Some researchers feel the bobcat has adapted well to urban sprawl and the intrusion of humans. Other experts feel the fate of the bobcat is in our safekeeping. In New Hampshire, where the bobcat is making a comeback from being bountied, this special animal is presently protected.

Oh you are the soul of the mountains, your spirit will always run free

to roam where you will, capturing still, the mystery you're meant to be

You're as wild as nature intended, untamed, elusive, alone

a shadow at night or in dawn's early light, a symbol of wilderness gone

Oh you are the soul of the mountains, silent, majestic and bold

You're the essence of freedom in God's greatest kingdom, the keeper of secrets untold

You're the spirit of life in the forest, dominion of your world so free

May the instincts inside you continue to guide you.....to live as you're born to be

Oh you are the soul of the mountains, your spirit will always live free

With a wish and a prayer, I think of you there, the way you were meant to be.

— cg Sept. 2000



Elaine Conners Center for Wildlife is a non-profit wildlife rehabilitation center located in Madison, New Hampshire. We are open during business hours every day but are not funded to be an around-the-clock emergency clinic. We ask that you contact us to make arrangements to bring in injured and orphaned wild animals during our business hours. For more information about our work or about volunteering, please call us at 603-