

# Living with Bobcats: Things you need to Know

Bobcats are common throughout Arizona at all elevations, especially in Sonoran desert, rimrock, and chaparral areas, and in the outskirts of urban areas where food is readily available. 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, and it is not uncommon to find one napping under a shrub in a backyard with brush. Individual bobcats will defend a territory of one to 12 square miles.



## **BOBCAT DESCRIPTION AND HABITS**

Despite decreasing habitat due to human development, bobcat populations remain stable. Although bobcats are elusive and tend to avoid people, it is not uncommon to observe them in some suburban areas, including Phoenix and Tucson. The Department

is committed to helping people learn how to behave responsibly and coexist safely in bobcat habitat.

- Tan with dark spots on coat
- Short tail with black tip on top side 12-30 pounds (males are larger than females)
- 18-24 inches tall, 24-36 inches long
- Mate December to March
- Average litter of 2-3 kittens, usually born from late March to early June
- Live 10-15 years
- Able to jump as high as 12 feet
- Carnivorous, generally feed on small mammals and birds (includes domestic birds and rabbits); will also eat lizards, snakes, and small pets, including house cats

## **POSSIBLE CONFLICTS WITH HUMANS OR PETS**

If you see a bobcat near your home, there is no need to panic. Bobcats rarely attack people, and most human attacks have been related to rabies.. It is more likely that bobcats are attracted to your yard because it has abundant wildlife, domestic birds, small pets, water, and shade or other shelter. If you have small pets, they need to be protected from bobcats and other predators. Keep small pets indoors, in an enclosed area with a roof, or on a leash when outside (a 6-foot tall fence is not necessarily good protection as bobcats are good jumpers and climbers). Domestic birds should be kept in an enclosed area with a sturdy roof, and do not spread seed that attracts other wildlife. Feeding bobcats, whether intentionally or inadvertently, can encourage them to become too comfortable around humans which may result in conflicts.





## WHAT ATTRACTS THEM?

Bobcats may visit an area to find food, water, shelter, or the space they need to live.

- Food may include birds, rodents, rabbits, small unattended pets, poultry or other domestic birds, and other small livestock.
- Water in pools, birdbaths, fountains, and pets' water dishes can attract bobcats. They will sometimes defecate in shallow water (such as pools and fountains).
- Shelter for bobcats can include rooftops, attics, patios, and the space underneath decks. Other small spaces can also make attractive dens (i.e., planters, rubbish piles, sheds, etc.). Bobcats are attracted to thick brush, shade, and unoccupied yards where they will sometimes rest during the day or bask in the sun.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO?

You may choose to watch and enjoy a bobcat or bobcat family sharing your yard. However, if you have small pets or livestock, you may want to discourage the bobcat from coming onto your property. Remember, it is always a good idea to keep wildlife wild. If you live in Tucson, visit [bobcatsintucson.net](http://bobcatsintucson.net) to learn more about a study of bobcats along the urban-wild land interface in the Tucson area and report bobcat activity in your area.

## TO PREVENT FURTHER PROBLEMS

- Keep domestic animals (dogs, cats, chickens, rabbits, rodents, etc.) in a secured enclosure with a sturdy roof.
- Feed your pets inside, or remove uneaten pet food between feedings.
- Close or patch openings in fences.
- Keep shrubbery, grass, etc. trimmed to deny bobcats hiding and resting cover.
- Deny access to bobcats by putting up fencing. However, since bobcats can jump up to 12 feet, a 6-foot fence may not deter them if they are attracted to something in the yard.
- Work with your neighbors to achieve a consistent solution to the situation.

## TO DISCOURAGE A BOBCAT

- Scare the bobcat off with loud noises or spray with a garden hose.
- If the animal is confined, open a gate, have all people leave the area, and allow it to leave on its own. If it is still confined the following day, or trapped inside a residence, contact a wildlife control business or the Arizona Game and Fish Department.
- Check for kittens in the area, and if kittens are there, then consider tolerating them for a few weeks until the kittens are large enough to leave the area with their mother.

## IN AN EMERGENCY

In the rare occasion that a bobcat bites a person or appears hyperactive, there may be some health concerns. Take the following actions:

- Contact your county animal control office.
- Fight back if it has attacked.
- Avoid the area and stay indoors.
- Call your local Arizona Game and Fish Department office, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday – Friday excluding holidays. Also, call Arizona Game and Fish if severe property damage has occurred, or if there is possession of a live bobcat. After hours and weekends, a dispatcher is available at 623 236-7201.

## REMOVAL IS A LAST RESORT

Bobcats tend to be abundant where food is plentiful, so even if a bobcat is removed, other bobcats will keep visiting the same area if the attractants are not removed. Bobcats are territorial and often will return to the area of capture post-relocation or may continue to engage in the same behaviors in the release area (i.e., killing poultry). Some bobcats have traveled 30 miles to return to their home range, so removing attractants is critical in reducing conflicts. For a fee, wildlife control businesses will remove animals from the property.

## POSSIBLE HEALTH CONCERNS

Rabies – Symptoms of rabies can include foaming at the mouth, erratic, hyperactive behavior, and/or fearful, paralyzed and lethargic behavior. Bobcats rarely get rabies. If you see any animal with symptoms of rabies, stay away from it and call 911, your closest [Arizona Game and Fish Department office](#), or a wildlife control business immediately.



Anyone bitten by a bobcat must immediately seek medical attention from a qualified healthcare provider. Whenever possible, the animal should be captured or killed and sent to a laboratory for rabies testing.

## LAWS AND POLICIES

- Bobcats are not considered a threat to human safety except in rare cases when they have rabies or are extremely aggressive. The Arizona Game and Fish Department does not routinely relocate bobcats.
- Bobcats are classified as predatory and fur-bearing animals. A valid hunting license is required, except in the case of depredation (killing of livestock) removal. See Arizona Game and Fish Department Hunting Regulations.
- The possession of live bobcats is illegal.
- State law prohibits firing a gun within a quarter-mile of an occupied residence or building without the permission of the owner.
- Check your local city ordinances, but most cities ban shooting firearms within city limits. Some cities ban the use of slingshots, BB guns, air guns, or bows.
- Refer to ARS-17-239 on wildlife depredation and Arizona Game and Fish Department Hunting Regulations for more information.

