



Volume 30/Issue 6

Bobcat

February 2017

# BOBCAT



**INSIDE:**  
Wild Cats  
Name Game  
Bobcat or Canada Lynx?



# BOBCAT

**W**hat wild cat earned its name from the length of its tail? If you guessed bobcat, you are right! Years ago, the word “bob” was often used to mean short. Because this cat has a short tail, people called it a “bob-tailed” cat. Over time the name was shortened to the name we use today, bobcat.

Bobcats are the most common wild cat in the United States. They are able to live in many different habitats. They may be found in forests, deserts and other areas. One thing bobcats like in their habitat is a thick layer of shrubs and low-growing plants to give them cover. Bobcats set up home ranges or territories in their habitats. They are loners; they don’t want other bobcats to move into their homes. To let other bobcats know an area is taken, they mark their territories with claw marks on trees, pee and poop. They create invisible fences with scent.

Low-growing plants around a bobcat’s home help them to grab their grub. Bobcats are ambush predators; they need to hide to catch dinner. They will slowly sneak up and pounce on their prey or sit still and wait for prey to wander too closely. Bobcats can leap 10 feet in one bound! That’s quite a distance for a small cat. Bobcats eat mostly small mammals, such as rabbits, hares, mice and squirrels.

Bobcats also need places to hide when resting. They need a nice rocky crevice, cave, hollow tree or hole in the ground. Bobcats will have many places around their homes to rest and may change their shelter daily. Only female bobcats raising young will stay in the same den for more than a few days.

Baby bobcats, called kits, are born in the spring. Usually the mother will have two or three kits, but sometimes as many as seven kits are born. Kits look like pet kittens when they are born with their eyes sealed shut and ears bent down. In about 10 days, the kit’s eyes open. They will drink mother’s milk for about two months, but need their mother until the leaves start to change in the fall. Kits may play hunt but usually won’t be able to catch food on their own until autumn. This is when young bobcats venture out to live without their mother.

Keep an eye out for bobcats when exploring around Idaho. They usually are shy and secretive, but bobcats have been spotted close to downtown Boise. You never know where a bobcat may be waiting for its next snack!



a special membrane in their eye that catches light. The glow you see when light hits a cat's eye at night is this membrane reflecting the light around the cat's eye. Smaller cats can hear high-pitched sounds humans cannot. Their ears help them locate rodents and insects that use these high-pitched sounds to communicate.

Once a cat has located its prey, it sneaks up on it. The cat crouches low to the ground and quickly moves toward the prey, then freezes. It waits for the best time, then pounces. Cats have long canine teeth that are made to cut the prey's spinal cord or windpipe. The cat's short muzzle allows it to breathe while biting and subduing its prey. The hunt is over quickly when the cat gets a good hold.

Have you ever heard the saying, 'A cat always lands on its feet'? Cats have an amazing sense of balance. They can climb trees and leap and twist through the air. They have a special structure in their inner ears that helps them balance and sense which way is up. When a cat is bending through the air, the inner ear guides the head and neck into a horizontal position. The rest of the body follows the head and neck, and soon the cat is standing on its feet.

If you or a friend has a cat, watch it around the house. Dangle a string in front of the cat or throw a toy mouse by it. You may see some wild hunting skills shine through in your pet.

# WILD CATS

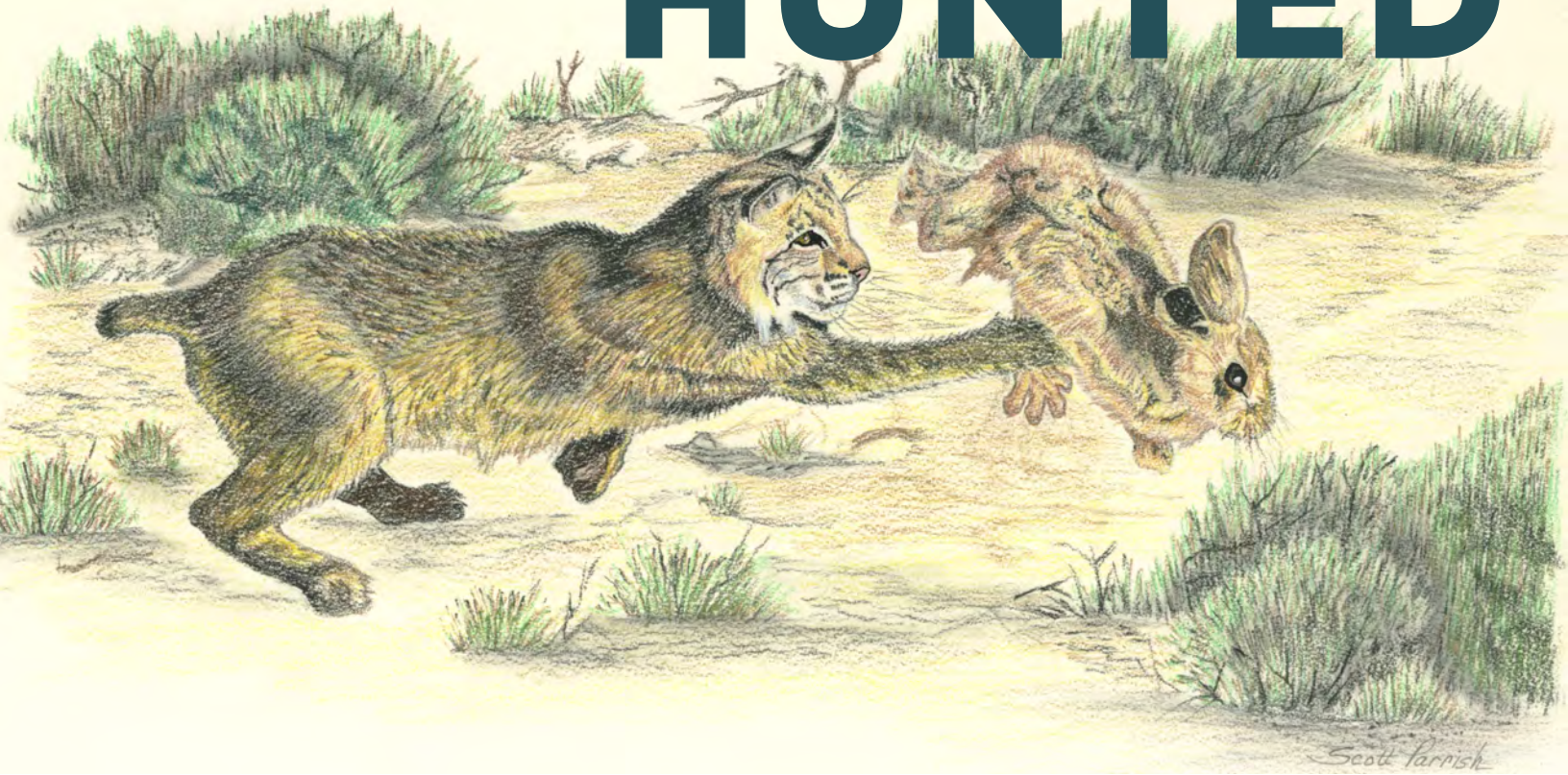
**D**o you have a pet cat at home? Cats have been companions to people for a long time. Ancient Egyptians worshipped cats. Farmers have traditionally kept cats to protect grain from mice. Cats appear in many of our favorite stories or cartoons like The Cat in the Hat and *Garfield*. Cats have been a part of our lives for so long that we forget our pets were domesticated from small wild cats.

Worldwide there are 35 species of wild cats. In North America, there are three species. Idaho has all three living in our state - the mountain lion, lynx and bobcat.

All cats, even a pet tabby, are made to hunt. They have special adaptations that make them some of the best hunters around. Cats rely on a combination of vision, hearing and smelling to find their prey. Most cats hunt at night. They have large eyes and sharp vision. During the day, cats can see as well as humans; but at night, their vision is six times more sensitive! Cats have



# HUNT... OR BE HUNTED



**W**hen you hear the word “predator,” do you think of a large, snarling animal with long claws? The word predator may bring images to your mind of huge teeth dripping with saliva and frightful feelings. Are these images and negative feelings really accurate?

A predator is any animal that kills and eats another animal to survive. This can mean an animal as tiny as a spider or as large as a whale. Predators come in many different sizes and shapes. Bobcats are predators. Trout, ladybugs and robins are predators, too. If an animal eats another animal, then it’s a predator.

Being a predator is not as easy as it sounds. Animals that are hunted and eaten by other animals are called prey. Prey animals do not want to be a predator’s meal. They have ways to avoid being caught. Prey animals often have large ears to hear predators sneaking up on them. Many prey animals can explode away from a predator with great speed. Some even look like rocks or

trees. Camouflage is a great way to avoid being eaten by a predator. Predators have to overcome all of a prey animal’s tricks to catch it. While predators are chasing their dinner, the prey might try to kick, bite, or sting them. Nine times out of ten, the predator will not catch its prey. The predator will go hungry. Life as a predator is not easy!

Predators are important parts of the ecosystem. They help maintain the balance of nature. Could you imagine how many mice there would be if we didn’t have red foxes or hawks to eat them? We might be overrun with mice and other pests eating our crops. Often predators eat sick and unhealthy animals. Removing unhealthy members from a herd helps to keep the whole herd healthy and strong.

Predators may sometimes be seen as vicious or bloodthirsty, but is this accurate? Predators kill for one reason – to survive. Our world would be a different place without predators.



# WHAT'S THAT?

**Y**ou're walking along a trail. All of the sudden, you see something grayish-white peeking out of the tall grass. Leaning forward you realize what it is – a skull. Now, the mystery really begins. What animal did that skull belong to, and how did it live its life?

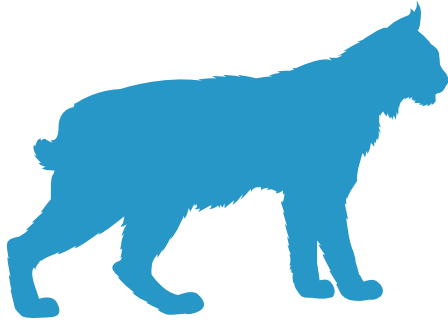
This may be a hard question to answer, but the skull will give you some clues. One of the best clues you have are the teeth. Teeth tell you what an animal eats. Animals that eat meat need teeth that will help them cut and tear. Meat eaters, called carnivores, have meat-cutting teeth along their cheeks. These teeth are sharp and pointed. When the top teeth and the bottom teeth come together, the teeth pass each other like scissors. Carnivores have no trouble slicing through the meat they like to eat!

Sharp pointed teeth may work well for meat eaters, but they sure wouldn't help plant eaters. Plant eaters are called herbivores. Plants take a lot of chewing to break down. Just think how long you need to chew celery! Herbivores have tall teeth in the back of their mouths with flat tops. Flat teeth let the animals slide their top and bottom teeth against each other to grind plants.

We have teeth in the back of our mouths with low bumpy crowns; so do bears. Teeth with this shape belong to omnivores. Omnivores eat both meat and plants, so they need teeth that help cut and grind.

The location of the eye sockets on the skull can also offer clues about the animal. Predators, animals that eat other animals, need to be able to tell distances. This comes in handy when reaching out to grab a mouse. Predators have eyes that face forward. Prey animals, animals that are eaten by other animals, have their eyes located more to the sides of their heads. This allows them to look for danger in almost every direction, without ever moving their heads.

Looking at these clues may not tell you what animal the skull came from, but it is a start. It may give you an idea of what the animal eats, and whether it is a predator or prey animal. What do you think bobcat teeth look like?



# NAME GAME

Everything has a name. You do. You have a first name and a last name. Most people also have a middle name.

Animals and plants also have two names. They have a common name and a scientific name. The common name is the name most people use when talking about the animal, such as bobcat. The scientific name is usually in Greek or Latin and is made up of two words. The first word is the genus name. The second part is called the species name. Sometimes the scientific name has three parts – the genus, the species and the subspecies. The Idaho ground squirrel has two subspecies the northern and the southern. They are the same type of squirrel, but they are just a tiny bit different.

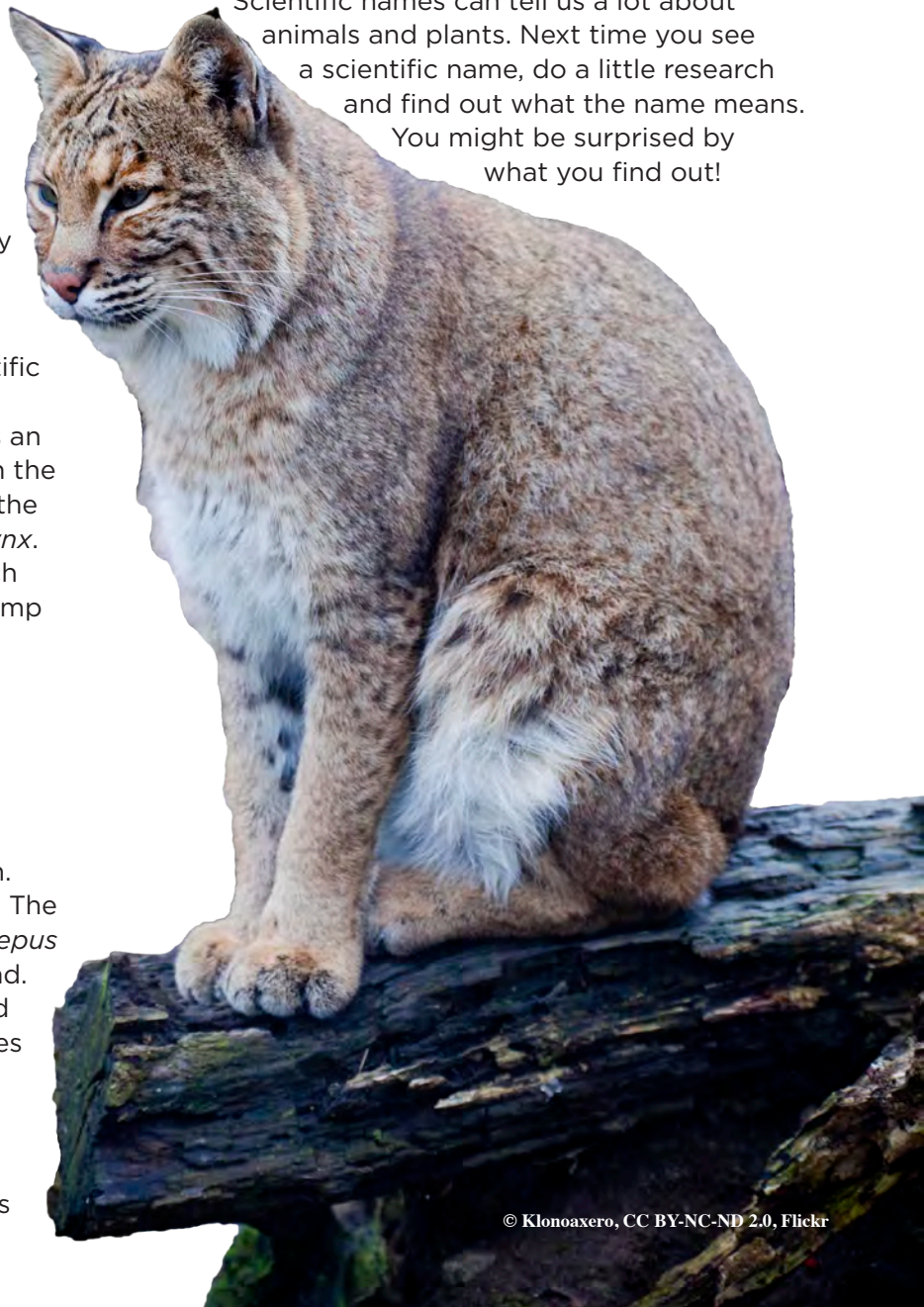
Have you ever wondered how animals and plants got their scientific names? The scientific name for the bobcat is *Lynx rufus*. The first part of a scientific name tells us what genus an animal or plant is in. Plants and animals with the same genus name are closely related. Both the bobcat and Canada lynx are in the genus *Lynx*. They have many things in common with each other; they are close cousins. Lynx means lamp or to see. This name refers to the lynx's and bobcat's bright eyes and good vision.

The species part of the scientific name tells us something specific about the plant or animal. Plants and animals are usually given their scientific names by the person that first discovered them and wrote about them. Sometimes animals are named after people. The white-tailed jackrabbit's scientific name is *Lepus townsendii*. It was named after J.K. Townsend. He was one of the first people that collected white-tailed jackrabbits. The bobcat's species name is *rufus*, which means reddish. This refers to the bobcat's reddish-brown body.

Often animals and plants are named for some special features they have. The skunk's

scientific name is *Mephitis mephitis*. This means bad odor, bad odor. That makes sense! The mountain lion's scientific name is *Puma concolor*. Concolor means one color. Mountain lions don't have any spots on their bodies when they are fully grown. Other wild cats in Idaho, bobcats and lynx, do have spots or markings on their bodies when they are fully grown.

Scientific names can tell us a lot about animals and plants. Next time you see a scientific name, do a little research and find out what the name means. You might be surprised by what you find out!



# BOBCAT OR CANADA LYNX?

People sometimes confuse bobcats and lynx. They do look a bit alike. Parts of their scientific names, the genus part, are even the same, *Lynx*. The Canada lynx is *Lynx canadensis*; the bobcat is *Lynx rufus*. How do you know if you are looking at a bobcat or lynx? A good place to start is where you saw the animal. Lynx are found fairly high in the mountains. They are also rare in Idaho. If you see a lynx, you are one of the lucky few. Here are some of the ways to tell a bobcat from a lynx.



## Bobcat

- Brownish-red in color with black spots or bars on belly and sometimes on legs and body
- Small ear tufts and white spot on back of ear
- Tail with dark bars on top and white on bottom
- Short legs and small feet

## Lynx

- Usually mixed shades of gray or yellowish-tan in color
- Long ear tufts
- Large tufts of fur on cheeks outlined in black
- Solid black tip on tail
- Long legs and large feet



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# Happy Valentine's Day

**A**re you giving anyone a special valentine this month? It's fun to make valentines to send to friends or give to family. With spring on the way, many animals will be giving "valentines" to each other, but their valentines are not made out of paper! When you are exploring outside this winter and spring, look for these animals and the "valentines" they give to each other.

Great horned owls are some of the earliest nesting birds in North America. They nest in late January and February. This is the time when great horned owls show they are committed to each other. During mating season, male and female great horned owls hoot back and forth to each other. They also bow and rub bills.

Some animals will give food to each other. Barn owls offer their mates tasty mice as a gift. Before the female ever starts to lay her eggs, the male will bring her food. This may be his way of showing her that he is a good hunter. While the female barn owl sits on her eggs, the male will need to bring her food. He will also need to help bring food to the owlets.

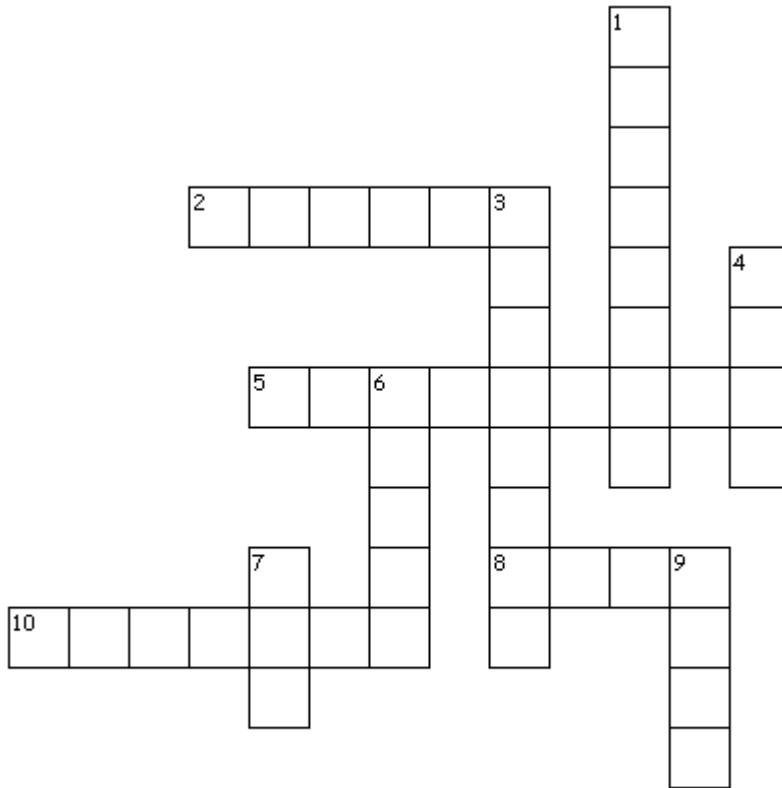
Sometimes animals try to impress their cuties by their actions. This is how bobcats impress their mates. They chase, bump and ambush each other. Play hunting between the male and female helps them bond with each other.

Male shrews get a bit chubby to impress female shrews. Some male shrews double their weight before breeding season. Could you imagine eating so much food that you doubled your weight in just a few weeks or months? You would have to eat tons of food! Female shrews must like their special guys on the plump side.

Some animals offer their mates valentines of dancing and singing. Male crows can put on quite a display. They dance, bow and strut with their wings and tail feathers spread out. While dancing, crows sing a song that is a bit like a rattle. Animals may not give real valentines to their sweeties, but they offer other gifts to show they like each other. Be sure to look for these animal "valentines" outside this winter and spring.



# Bobcat Criss-Cross



## Words

Ambush  
Carnivore  
Habitats  
Kit  
Lynx  
Predator  
Prey  
Rabbits  
Rufus  
Tail

### Across

2. Bobcats are \_\_\_\_\_ hunters.
5. An animal that eats meat.
8. The bobcat was named for its short \_\_\_\_\_.
10. A favorite food of bobcats.

### Down

1. An animal that eats other animals.
3. Bobcats live in many different \_\_\_\_\_.
4. An animal that is eaten by other animals.
6. This means reddish.
7. The name given to a baby bobcat.
9. This means lamp or to see.

## WILDLIFE EXPRESS

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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