

Canadian Lynx

Canada lynx are short-tailed, long-legged wildcats. Though similar in appearance to bobcats, lynx may appear taller because of their long legs. The weight of lynx is similar to that of bobcat - about 20 to 30 pounds - but some bobcat males can be considerably bigger. Many people assume lynx are bigger animals, probably due to their thick furs and large feet, but large northern bobcats outweigh the largest lynx. Ear tufts are longer on lynx, and they have a solid black-tipped tail, compared to the black-topped, white-bottomed tail on bobcats. Also the lynx's tail is tawny gray with a black tip, whereas the bobcat's tail has narrow black bands and a black tip. Lynx are tawny gray, sometimes with faint spots on their inner legs. Both their gray-brown faces and light gray ear tufts are edged with black. The cats' large eyes and ears give them excellent sight and hearing.

Like most other cats, lynx have retractable claws for capturing prey, fighting and climbing. In winter, their large feet act like snowshoes, enabling the cats to walk easily on the surface of deep snow. Dense, coarse hair that grows on their paws in winter also increases the snowshoe effect and helps keep their feet warm.



Since lynx are solitary, nocturnal animals that avoid people, they are seldom seen and little is known about their everyday habits. Lynx can live within close proximity to humans, but human actions often result in lynx deaths. The cats are quite susceptible to hunting, trapping and being hit by cars.

Snowshoe hares are lynx's primary food. Lynx also eat red squirrel, other small mammals and some birds, including grouse. Sometimes they consume larger animals that have died from other causes. The lynx's summer diet is more varied than the winter diet.

Lynx are not fast runners. The cats rely more on stealth than speed for capturing prey; they will ambush prey from a concealed spot beside a well used animal trail. Biologists estimate that for every animal a lynx captures, it misses ten. On average, a lynx kills every other night, eating 150-200 hares a year.

The range of the lynx is essentially that part of North America covered by boreal, or northernmost, forest and occupied also by the snowshoe hare. Between 1900 and the mid-1950s, lynxes became scarce in the southern portions of this range. This was probably due to trapping during periods of snowshoe hare scarcity (low years in the 10-year cycle). At these times lynx numbers are already low and fewer young are surviving to adulthood, so trapping can seriously deplete, or even eradicate, local populations. In the past 25 years, lynxes have reoccupied some of this southern range, and this may be due to tighter legal restrictions on trapping. The northern range expansion of the bobcat in the past century may also have contributed to the overall decline in lynx numbers. When both species compete for the same space and food resources, the lynx most often yields to the more aggressive and adaptable bobcat.