

Bobcat Predation - Description

Bobcat hunting and killing behavior is much like that of cougars because they prefer to stalk their prey and attack from cover. On small prey, such as lambs, kids and fawns, they bite into the skull or back of the neck and may leave claw marks on the back, sides and shoulders. Bobcats may also kill with a bite in the throat, typically just back of the jaws over the larynx. This could result from catching the prey after it falls, or it may be individual bobcat behavior.

Bobcats normally do not prefer to bite repeatedly in killing prey but tend to secure a lethal hold on the neck or throat and hang on until the prey stops struggling. Frequently, when bobcats secure a grip over the larynx, the animal suffocates rapidly and there is virtually no bleeding from the injury. The adult bobcat's canine teeth are normally about 3/4 to 1 inch apart. Generally, an estimate of this spacing is easier to make on bobcat kills than on fox and coyote kills.

As a rule, bobcats do not prey on adult sheep and goats, or on calves, but are known to kill adult deer and antelope. They attack larger prey much like cougars by leaping on the back or shoulders and commonly leave claw marks. On small prey, there may be claw marks on any part of the body, but they are usually concentrated on the neck, shoulders and ribs.

Bobcats generally seem to begin feeding on the viscera by entering behind the ribs, but their feeding patterns vary. They may begin feeding on the neck, shoulders or hindquarters. Their feeding pattern is relatively neat, typical of the cat family. On small animals, they may consume nearly the entire body, including the head, in a single feeding or they may carry the carcass away. Bobcats prefer to kill their own food but seem to feed somewhat more readily on carrion than cougars do.

Bobcats also may cover carcass remains, and frequently feed several times on a carcass. Being smaller than cougars, bobcats do not reach out as far in raking up debris, normally not much more than 15 inches. This, and much smaller tracks, helps distinguish between bobcat and cougar caches. Bobcats also may cover their urine and feces with a small mound of debris, typically much smaller than those made by cougars.

Like cougar tracks, bobcat tracks are round and lack claw marks but they are much smaller, only 2 to 3 inches in diameter. Also, the rear pad is shaped differently, being relatively straight in front, with a lobe at each side in the rear.

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