



Canada lynx

Lynx canadensis

The Canada lynx seems to be proof that nature provides exactly what an animal needs to equip it for life. This compact and long-legged resident of northern forests has thick, long fur to protect against cold and big paws to walk on snow. The lynx has long occupied colder, northern habitats, mainly in Canada and, in the United States, the forests of Alaska, northern states and the Rocky Mountains. Given Endangered Species Act protection and designated as threatened in the year 2000, the lynx is a living argument for habitat protection. Conserving the habitat where this big cat lives safeguards it along with dozens of other animals and plants.

The gray ghost

The color of Canada lynx fur varies from yellowish to rusty or reddish-brown, muted with silver and tipped with white – a shadowy coloring for an animal active in the shadow hours of dawn and dusk. Lynx have long tufts of black fur on the tips of their ears, a ruff of long hairs that

frames the face, and a short, black-tipped tail. Secretive and silent, lynx are seldom seen by people.

Making more lynx

Adult Canada lynx generally avoid each other. The only time male and female lynx interact is when they mate in February to March. Females have one litter per year in the late spring. If the mother is in good physical condition and snowshoe hare prey are available, the one to five kittens will likely survive. Kittens nurse for three to five months, but begin eating solid food at one month. The young remain with their mother until the following mating season, and siblings may remain together after leaving the mother. Lynx generally reach sexual maturity at about two years old.

Snowshoe hare on the menu – again

Snowshoe hare make up about 75 percent or more of the Canada lynx's diet. The populations of these two species are linked. Snowshoe hare numbers regularly



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rise over a nearly 10-year period to a peak before crashing, and, with a slight lag, lynx numbers follow the same pattern, especially in the northern part of their range. There is some thought that lynx disperse to the northern United States when their snowshoe hare prey become scarce. In the Northeast, there is currently no evidence of snowshoe hare cycling; hare densities are likely more affected by forest practices than by 10-year cycles.

On the hunt

Canada lynx require large hunting areas; home ranges in the United States may run between 12 and 83 square miles. In Maine, where snowshoe hare densities are currently high, territories average 22 square miles for males and 10 square miles for females. Home ranges are larger in winter than in summer. A male's territory may overlap with or contain the range of two or three females and their young. Although they run quickly only in short bursts when hunting, lynx can and will travel long distances to explore or search for food.

Lynx are visual hunters and also rely on their excellent hearing to locate prey. Although hare are their main prey, Canada lynx will hunt birds, rodents, deer and also eat remains of moose or caribou. They stalk their prey, waiting beside a trail and leaping upon the animal in one bound. Adult males and females



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without young generally hunt alone. Females with young will hunt cooperatively, spreading across an area in a line; one lynx may flush prey and another lynx farther down the line catches it. The family eats, and the kittens have a hunting lesson.

Here, kitty

Canada lynx numbers are not as dangerously low as those of another protected U.S. cat, the ocelot, but their numbers have been falling in the United States. In the 1980s, states began restricting lynx trapping; Maine stopped lynx trapping in 1963. Trapping was banned altogether in the United States with Endangered Species Act protection. A major factor in the decline of resident lynx was the lack of guidance for conserving lynx and snowshoe hare habitat in U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management land-use plans. Methods of timber harvest can either enhance or destroy lynx habitat; these federal agencies have made changes to their timber harvest regimens and now manage their lands to conserve lynx.

Maine likely hosts the largest population of Canada lynx on private land in the lower 48 states. Extensive clearcutting done to salvage spruce budworm-damaged trees in the 1970s and 1980s created a young, regenerating spruce-fir forest that is supporting a historically high population of hares and lynx. Forest management plans on corporate forestry lands will help guide forest practices that will benefit the lynx.

Cool cats

Canada lynx have everything they need to live in their boreal forest habitat – sharp eyesight, acute hearing, warm fur. Elusive and solitary, lynx grace the nation’s forest wilderness. While few of us are likely to see one, it is good to know that this wild cat shares the planet with us.

The word lynx comes from the Greek word meaning “white” or “to shine” and could refer either to the lynx’s shining eyes or shining coat.

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