



# Foothills

## Nature Notes

CITY OF PALO ALTO • COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT • OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND GOLF DIVISION



### Bobcats

Foothills Park is home to many different species of animals. Of the various larger mammals, the bobcat is the one most frequently sighted by visitors. Normally the bobcat is a very shy animal, yet several animals have made Foothills Park their home over the years.

Bobcats are solitary animals except during the breeding season. A female bobcat can breed any time of the year, but usually mates in the early Spring. She looks for a den site under a rock ledge or in a hollow log. After a gestation period of 63 to 70 days, usually two to four kittens are born. The kittens are born with their eyes closed, which open after nine to ten days. They are weaned after three to four months, and begin to eat some meat during their second month. Female kittens become sexually mature within their first year, whereas male kittens aren't sexually mature until their second year. The young bobcats stay with their mother until the next breeding season, at which time they go their separate ways.

The young bobcat males seek out new territories. The young females stay in the vicinity of their birth place, sometimes even settling within their mothers' home range. Size of the home ranges varies (depending on food availability) from 0.4 to 16.2 square miles (0.9 to 42 square kilometers). Males generally have a larger home range. Female ranges sometimes overlap.

Bobcats generally eat small rodents and mammals, in some areas they have been known to bring down a weak or sick deer during the winter or spring. In Foothills Park, they most likely feed upon small rodents such as gophers, and any other "bite-size" animal that can be caught.

Historically, and at present, bobcats are found in the lower 48 states and northern Mexico. Bobcats vary in color from a rusty red to a yellowish brown to gray. They have a prominent facial ruff and their ears are tipped with tufts of black hair. The tail is relatively short,

black tipped, and white on the underside. The belly of the bobcat is sometimes heavily spotted. The average weight for bobcats ranges from 17.5 to 38 pounds (8 to 14 kilograms). The total body length (including tail) ranges from 25.5 to 51.25 inches (65 to 130 centimeters) and the height at the shoulder ranges from 17.5 to 29.5 inches (45 to 75 centimeters). The females are generally smaller than the males. Bobcats can live up to 15 years in the wild and usually longer in captivity.

In 1975, the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), placed the ocelot, the tiger and the cheetah on its Appendix I list. An Appendix I listing bans all commercial trade in those species or the products made from them. The spotted “belly” fur of the bobcat became the substitute for the large cats on Appendix I. Despite the introduction of bobcat pelts to the fur market, the North American bobcat populations are stable or increasing.

Since bobcats are solitary hunters that prefer to hunt at dawn or dusk, this is the best time to catch a glimpse of one. Perhaps the next time you are hiking through the Park, you’ll be lucky enough to see a bobcat.

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