

## **SPOTTING THE ELUSIVE BOBCAT CAN BE JUST A MATTER OF LUCK**

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I have been intrigued by wildlife throughout my long life. My early years' interests were fueled by my passion for hunting, fishing and trapping. In time, years of experience and success unraveled some, but not all, of the mystery and intrigues their habits and lifestyle once held for me. I have learned to view them in a much different light. I now get as much, or more, pleasure observing and learning as much as possible about all forms of wildlife instead of considering them as simply potential game.

Fortunately, I have been lucky enough to observe most of New York's native species with the exception of moose in their natural habitat. Even when spending the greater part of one's working and recreational life in the outdoors, luck plays a big part in observing particular types of wildlife.

Some animals are especially elusive or nocturnal in nature affording few opportunities to observe them. The same is true where numbers are few and their preferred habitat normally consists of wilderness or dense ground cover. The bobcat is one such animal that generally meets all three criteria. I have been very fortunate in sighting what I believe to be an above average number of these elusive felines. The latest was so unusual and exciting it prompted this article.

My first and second sightings occurred while I was trapping beaver in the winter and early spring. It was not unusual to see bobcat signs on the snow-covered ground; sighting one was a different matter.

I was trapping in the vicinity of Balsam Lake, which is not far from the Indian River back in the Moose River Plains. The roads had been close pending spring breakup and my mode of transportation at that time and place was exclusively on foot.

My route led me by a large logging camp that had been active a couple of weeks before. I noticed fresh cat tracks in the snow in front of the camp. Fearing a pet house cat had been left behind, I followed the tracks around to the rear of the building calling, "here, kitty, kitty". A bobcat bolted at my approach and streaked away to nearby cover.

My second sighting was on the outlet of Squaw Lake. I was staying in Alan Wilcox's camp on Beaver Lake and was approaching Squaw from there on snowshoes. It was a beautiful sunny day and as I came nearer to the lake the stillness was broken by the loud prolonged wail of a lovesick male bobcat. I moved slowly and carefully ahead hoping to get a look at the caller. I spotted him standing on the ice in the bright afternoon sunlight, a most magnificent specimen. When I tried to entice him closer with my impression of a dying rabbit's scream, he took off in the opposite direction like his tail was afire.

Wife Nancy shared another sighting with me on the shore of Woodhull Lake. We were trolling in the middle of the lake when we noticed movement on some large rocks on the shore. I turned the boat in that direction and as we got nearer we observed three small bobcat kittens playing together. When they spotted us they quickly disappeared in a jumble of large rocks.

I cannot recall offhand how many cats I have seen from a motor vehicle. One I will never forget was a small kitten, hog fat that ran several yards ahead of my truck. It was looking for an exit over the high, sharp banks of snow. When it finally found an exit, it quickly became bogged down in the deep powder. The cat ducked under a

convenient hardwood treetop and turned and gazed back at me rather matter of factly. I drove on leaving him to his devices and wondered to myself what the poor little critter was going to find to eat.

The incident that sparked this article occurred just two week ago at the height of our sub-zero weather. Wife Nancy and I witnessed it late one afternoon from our living room window. Glancing across the frozen North Branch of the Moose River, we saw two bobcats walking along rather sedately in single file on the frozen streambed. It was their actions and relationship that made it even more interesting and unique.

A kitten led the procession, turning frequently and bounding back to lock its mother's head in its forelegs. The mother was very nonchalant about the whole business and stopped off to gaze at our house. As they finally turned to meander up the riverbank and into cover, my thoughts returned once again to years earlier when I saw the kitten in the road.

How was that poor mother going to cope with the snow and cold to support them both? Had she lost siblings to the little one earlier? One thing is certain; they and a good many other species of wildlife will see more mealtimes than meals before this winter is over.