



Keeping a Bobcat or Canadian Lynx as a Pet A Comprehensive Guide to Acquiring, Raising and Understanding Northwest Bobcats and Canadian Lynx as Pets.

Many of you have wondered about the feasibility of owning a beautiful, exotic cat as a pet and companion. There is an aura of mystery and almost fearful respect around the "wild" cats. Yet the nature of cats remains the same whether you're considering the common domestic housecat or the majestic Canadian Lynx. All cats tend to a life-style of relative inactivity which is interrupted primarily by the search for food. Cats often sleep 18 hours a day and only stir to appease hunger.

Cats by nature are clean and generally need little training to use a litter box. They are independent and quite self-sufficient yet are companionable and loyal to their owners. Bobcat and Lynx, when tamed and raised properly with a lot of human contact, bond very strongly to people. This guide will explain exactly how to do this.



By the way - One question we are asked quite often is what the difference is between Bobcat and Lynx. Well, the Lynx is long and lanky with large "snowshoe" paws. He has very light spots - hardly noticeable. He lives at high altitudes and is rarely seen by man. The Bobcat, on the other hand, is more recognizable as a cat. Ears are tufted, like the lynx, but he's quite spotted on the back and belly. He ranges in color from honey orange to smoky blue and his belly is white. This really makes the spots stand out. Both Bobcat and Lynx have "beards". Both are pretty laid back in temperament and quite loving when raised with humans.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR CAT

Owning a tame bobcat or lynx isn't something which is mysterious or difficult to learn. Those of us with an affinity toward cats know that cat "ownership" is tenuous at best; the question usually being who owns whom! Bobcats and Lynx are loving, loyal and apt to be jealous. But the bond between human and feline is not tenuous - it is very real and very strong.

As far as other pets in a household in which you want to introduce a Bobcat or Lynx kitten, we have found few problems. Older "established" cats are usually unfriendly at first (though not always) and need about 3 weeks or so to accept the new kitten. Once a Bobcat or Lynx kitten bonds to an older housecat he will usually be affectionate and playful with it even after he towers over the housecat. In fact, after several years of placing Bobcat and Lynx kittens we are convinced that those



that are raised with domestic cats, small children and/or friendly dogs turn out to be the gentlest of all. The Bobcats and Lynx seem to know that the smaller animals and children are fragile and treat them as such.

Speaking of dogs, they are most always accepted by Bobcat and Lynx pets - whether they were there first or whether they came into the picture later. We have found that these exotic cats just adore dogs in any way, shape, or form. It's almost scary the way Bobcat and Lynx kittens love dogs. They purr and rub on any dog they happen upon. Even the adult cats have been known to jump into unsuspecting dogs' laps when a car door is opened!

Also, speaking of purring, exotic cats do purr. And how! Bobcat and Lynx love to sleep with their owners but the purring and loving gets annoying at times. One solution is to situate your cat's bed on the floor next to yours. A lot of owners buy travel carriers and let the cat sleep in them. In the first few weeks, a heating pad turned to low should be available for the kitten. If the kitten is in a confined space, however, he should be able to crawl off the pad in case he gets too warm.

The travel carrier/bed is a good idea because as the kitten is exposed to more and more new situations he has his "safe" spot to go to. Many owners buy a piece of "sheepskin" material or other soft fabric and leave it in the carrier all the time as this is comforting to the kitten. Many kittens actually try to "nurse" on this material.

BOTTLE FEEDING & WEANING

Most new Bobcat or Lynx owners prefer to adopt their kittens as early as possible to form a strong bond. We usually begin bottle feeding our kittens before they are 10 days of age and allow them to go to their new homes after we've had them on the bottle for at least a week. The formula we use is simple whole milk that's been treated with Lactaid (or Dairy Ease) caplets to break down the lactose (found in most grocery store pharmacies) and poured into 2 oz. pet nursers. The remainder can be refrigerated up to 5 days. The bottles can be found at most pet shops although we always supply our customers with all the bottles and nipples they need when they adopt one of our kittens. We use a small brad heated red hot to make the hole in the nipple as a needle hole isn't large enough for the thick formula. We feed our formula heated to body temperature on demand - whenever the kitten seems hungry.



At around two weeks of age we add a can (5.5oz.) of cat food (such as Friskies Liver and Chicken) to this formula for more bulk. The cat food and milk are then blended together and put through a strainer before feeding. The key to this formula is the Lactaid caplets added to the milk. The milk is then rendered easy to digest for almost any baby animal. We've had great success with this formula. A bowl of water should always be available to kittens as they lap it up often after 3 weeks or so. You'll get the feel of your kitten as you go.

Along about 8 to 10 weeks or so your kitten will gradually get more voracious at feeding time and you'll know its time to start weaning. You can start by squirting formula over canned kitten food and keep your fingers crossed. But, more likely than not, it won't be this easy. We usually try to introduce some solid food with formula each morning after 8 weeks, and if the kitten isn't interested we wait until the next day. One of these days things will click and the kitten will start to eat -albeit slowly at first. Here is where another cat in the family helps.

Bobcat and Lynx kittens will try to imitate an older cat which is eating and sometimes this is all the training your kitten needs. But, one thing is for certain. Bobcat and Lynx kittens do not wean as easily or as soon as domestic kittens. Don't be discouraged if by 9 weeks the kitten is still nursing. One fine morning kitty will surprise you and start eating.

One note of caution: Throughout the first year of a Bobcat or Lynx Kitten's life, he needs lots of calcium. We can't stress this enough. Like a large dog, calcium to these exotic cats is important for the long bone formation. So, if you wean a kitten completely from milk be sure to add some steamed bone meal (a teaspoon or so per day) to his diet for at least a year.

DIET AND HEALTH

After weaning there are several good cat foods on the market for these pets. We mix our own for our breeders, consisting of red meat, chicken, liver, cooked cereal, calcium and vitamins. If feeding any canned cat food, though, you must add 1 golf ball size portion of raw hamburger, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp of calcium, 1 tablespoon of minced raw liver, and 1 tablespoon cooking oil for each 5.5 ounce can of food. This makes canned food complete for a bobcat or lynx. The important thing here is not to let your cat get hooked on only one food (liver, for instance) to the exclusion of all other foods. As kittens these exotic cats need to be exposed to lots of different tastes. Some Bobcats love hard-boiled eggs. All our cats love chicken necks - but too many of these can also be detrimental. One woman's bobcat came down with diarrhea after several days of 10 plus chicken necks. The vet determined that hormones given to local broilers to fatten them up were injected into the necks of these chickens and the Bobcat got an overdose of these hormones. The diarrhea cleared up about a week after stopping the necks!



We vaccinate our bottle raised kittens 2 times: at 8 weeks and 12 weeks. We use Fel-o-Vax (it works against feline rhinotracheitis, calici and panleukopenia [distemper] viruses). You can vaccinate once annually thereafter. Some owners vaccinate their cats against rabies also. As far as feline leukemia vaccine, this is a decision between you and your vet. Make sure you only use killed virus vaccinations

When properly vaccinated adult Bobcat and Lynx rarely ever get sick. Kittens, however, do get their share of stomach upsets and bouts of diarrhea. These are usually minor and are more than likely related to changes in the diet. One thing we like to caution our cat owners about is using medication on these cats that can't be licked off. All cats have a poor ability to neutralize and excrete poisons so even relatively harmless substances such as aspirin are toxic to them. So if your kitten's anus is raw from a bout of diarrhea be extra cautious about salves and topical medications. Ask a vet first.

If a Bobcat or Lynx kitten has diarrhea and/or occasional vomiting but still has a good appetite you probably should do nothing out of the ordinary. The first sign of a sick cat is usually lack of appetite. If the kitten goes more than 12 hours without eating then it is time to call the vet (an older cat can go much longer without food). Dehydration is a problem with kittens. But most of the time vomiting, and/or diarrhea will clear up spontaneously,

Finally, be on the lookout for flea infestations if you live in a flea endemic area. Fleas suck blood and could cause anemia in a young, otherwise healthy cat. One Spot and Advantage make a product that is safe for felines and is easy to apply.

LITTER BOX TRAINING & DISCIPLINE

Bobcat and Lynx are felines so by nature they are clean about their toilet habits. Kittens will usually use a litter box very early if the box is placed in a spot that they have used as a toilet area. The best way to determine this spot is to use 2 or 3 litter trays in different places or to use newspaper allover until you determine where the kitten wants to go. They always go in the same place unless something has frightened them from the area. Putting the kitten into the box from time to time also helps.

Several different owners who have pet Bobcats have trained them to use the toilet exclusively. Our breeders are in pens which are above ground and they always go in the same place. Since Bobcats and Lynx love water so much (more about this later) we used to have big rubber bowls in the pens until we realized that the cats love to urinate and defecate in water! In fact, our water cups now are 2 feet up on the back wall because any lower and they become toilets.



Speaking of water - Bobcats and Lynx love it. But, only on their terms. You can't put them in water but they will go into it readily on their own. But bathing an exotic cat isn't so tough. In our opinion it's a lot easier than bathing a house cat. One couple who have an adult Bobcat buy goldfish to put in the bathtub in a few inches of water. Their cat loves to "fish". She has yet to catch a single one, though. Bobcat and Lynx love to play with a running hose.

Water pistols are every cat's bane. So, they are the perfect discipline tool. A squirt in the face gets their attention fast. If your pet is guilty of bad behavior use the water pistol. It really works.

NIPPING TROUBLE IN THE BUD: DECLAWING AND NEUTERING

As your Bobcat or Lynx grows to her adult size (anywhere from 35 to 55 lbs) there are certain procedures that we highly recommend to keep her gentle and safe as a pet. First, after 9 weeks we recommend declawing all four paws and neutering. Our vet charges about \$200 for the operation and he doesn't even use stitches - only a kind of adhesive. The kitten comes home the same afternoon and scarcely knows he's been altered. Please find a vet who is experienced in the procedure, however, as we know of some cats who have experienced tremendous pain from poorly done operations.

We have been asked about defanging and/or grinding down the canines in these cats. As far as we're concerned this is an unnecessary procedure. Bobcat and Lynx kittens will tend to chew and bite in play as they are teething but behavior modification (as in the spray bottle or a firm "no") is usually all that is needed to stop this. Persistence is the key here. Just like with any child once or twice doesn't cut it. But, if you stay on top of the situation and let them know the rules they will learn to be gentle. Also, a good diet will keep them much calmer and less likely to be a problem. Hand raised Bobcat and Lynx kittens are by nature loving and affectionate and eager to please.

Bobcats and Lynx by nature are not aggressive and will shy away from that which scares them. But if cornered a scared Bobcat or Lynx might attack, as all felines are apt to do. You need to know that he can't hurt you so you can calm him down and soothe him. By the way, a declawed Bobcat or Lynx can still climb.

Make sure the neutering is done early: 9-16 weeks. Please don't wait until after 8 months or more as we have seen pet Bobcats come into heat at 10 months (almost unheard of in the wild where these cats don't mature until 2 to 4 years of age!). The special treatment and loving these cats get as pets seem to make them precocious so they can breed earlier. We had one female breeder that we raised for several months in the house who bred and gave birth before her first birthday! She was too immature mentally to take care of her litter but what a surprise.

Bobcat and Lynx who are neutered early hardly ever spray. The only 2 bobcats we know of who started spraying as adults were neutered at a year old, One was a male who had 3 different homes and he stopped spontaneously after a few months. The other was a female who had to adjust to several traumatic changes in the household. The owner, however, built a huge enclosed pen that opens into the house. Now she can come in when she's being supervised and stay outdoors the rest of the time. She seems quite content.

ADULT CARE AND LEASH TRAINING

As Bobcats and Lynx grow older it's good to train them to walk on a leash. As kittens they should learn to wear a harness (we don't recommend a collar). They leash train moderately well, and also, like dogs, they enjoy riding in cars. We don't know why this is so but we've seen it so many times with our cats that we know it is true. Bobcat and Lynx usually don't even need a travel carrier - they like to look out the windows and sleep in their owner's laps.

Many exotic cat owners build some type of outdoor enclosure or screen in a deck or carport as their kittens get older. We always tell new owners to let the kitten outdoors whenever possible (many kittens will consistently defecate outdoors if allowed out enough). Thus, the Bobcat or Lynx won't feel imprisoned and overcompensate the first time they're let outdoors. If neutered early these cats have no reason to roam far but as felines so many times are, they are curious. Like housecats Bobcat and Lynx seem to prefer to be indoors where the people are. They bond very strongly to humans and will come when called - hence the reason for the outdoor enclosures. These cats love to rub on people and people love to pet them. They'd be very easy to kidnap so you don't want them roaming free when you're not home. Keeping them in an enclosure when not supervised also guarantees safety from cars and aggressive dogs.

Bobcat and Lynx are so people-oriented that one of the complaints we've heard from owners is that they try to get in everyone's laps - some jump into cars as soon as the door is opened! If you live close to other homes you probably need an enclosure to satisfy fearful neighbors just as you wouldn't let your dog roam freely. We've never had a report of one of our pets attacking anyone - as we've said they are quite unaggressive and unless seeking love will shy away from strangers. Sometimes these cats will sense that a certain person isn't a "cat-person" and won't have anything to do with him - just as dogs don't like certain people - but tame Bobcat and Lynx won't attack people. When traveling, however, we feel it is prudent to have the harness and leash on just in case your cat gets spooked. Be warned, though, everyone who sees your exotic cat on his leash will ask thousands of questions. One woman complains that she can't go 10 feet without attracting a crowd.

ACQUIRING YOUR PET BOBCAT OR LYNX

To find a licensed breeder who sells Bobcat or Lynx kittens you should contact your state agency that regulates game and wild animals. In Montana this is the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks or (FWP). In Minnesota it's the DNR - Department of Natural Resources. These agencies can give you the names and locations of registered fur farms that raise Bobcat and/or Lynx.

We sell our cats to out-of-state customers with a Montana State Game farm receipt and a Federal USDA bill of sale. The buyer is responsible to find out the legalities of owning a wild animal in his home state.

Check our web site (<http://www.bobcatsMT.com>) for Bobcat and Lynx kitten prices. We supply all bottles, nipples, samples of formula and feed, immunization records and detailed instructions. We vaccinate the kittens we sell and supply additional vaccines as needed. Our veterinarian has *offered* to "coach" your vet in the proper care of these exotic animals if need be. We strongly encourage questions and take as much time as possible with the new owners to acquaint them with their new pet. We also supply references of happy pets and their owners on request.

Our Bobcat and Lynx have supplied us with many, many hours of enjoyment and fun. Seeing how well these cats bond to people we know that having them as pets can be very rewarding. These cats can live well into their 20's in captivity so they literally become a pet for life. Owning a pet Bobcat or Lynx is an unequaled experience.

BITTERROOT BOBCAT & LYNX

Barbara Roe, Owner

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