

CANADA LYNX

Felis lynx (Threatened Colorado, Federally)

MEMBERS OF THE cat family, lynx are medium-sized carnivores that weigh 20-30 pounds. Lynx are distinguished from the more common bobcat by their large snowshoe-like feet and long — and sometimes crooked appearing — rear legs. Both species have tufts of hair on their ears but the bobcat's tufts are shorter and less noticeable.

Lynx occur in the boreal forests across North America. Their core range is in northern Canada and parts of Alaska below the Arctic Circle where they are quite common. The populations follow the 9- to 12-year cycle of their main prey — snowshoe hares. The northern populations of lynx can drop by 90 percent, mostly due to starvation, when the hare populations crash. Hares are probably not cyclic in the lower 48 United States due to our naturally more open forests.

Colorado is the southern periphery of their range. Lynx habitat in the state is mostly in the high-elevation coniferous forests above 8,000 feet.

Lynx are very specialized carnivores

that prey mostly on snowshoe hares and red or pine squirrels. Their food habits are probably more diverse in Colorado due to a larger variety of alternate prey, such as cottontail rabbits, jackrabbits, rabbits and ground squirrels.

Lynx were probably quite common in the state prior to settlement by European man. The decline in the lynx population in Colorado is not scientifically quantifiable. Poisoning of wolves and grizzly bears, plus the general disregard for wildlife conservation in the latter part of the 19th century, may have played a major role in the population decline.

Lynx became a state endangered species in 1973. This same year, the last known wild lynx was illegally trapped in the Vail area. The lynx became a federally listed threatened species in the lower 48 states on March 24, 2000.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife continues to monitor 80 of the 166 lynx that were reintroduced into the San Juan and Rio Grande National forests between 1998 and 2004. In 2004, 14 known litters were produced with a total of 39 kittens.

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Lynx became a state endangered species in 1973 and Colorado began reintroducing them in the state in 1998.