



## Summary of 2017 Bobcat Observations in Ohio

February 2018

Bobcats were found throughout Ohio in early settlement times. They were concentrated primarily in the large, lowland areas of the north and unglaciated Allegheny Plateau region of the southeastern portion of the state. As swamps and lowlands were drained and forests cleared to make way for settlements and cropland, the bobcat population declined. By 1850, they were considered extirpated from the state. From 1850 through the 1960s, there were occasional reports of bobcats, mainly in eastern Ohio. From 1970 through 2017, there have been 2,025 verified reports of bobcats in Ohio.

Verified reports represent positive identification of a bobcat, usually as a result of the animal being killed on the road, photographed, or incidentally trapped. Verified reports provide limited information regarding the distribution and abundance of bobcats in Ohio. Further, they provide an index of change in relative abundance.

Overall, verified sightings have increased over the past decade (Fig. 1). In July 2014, the bobcat was removed from the list of Ohio endangered and threatened species.

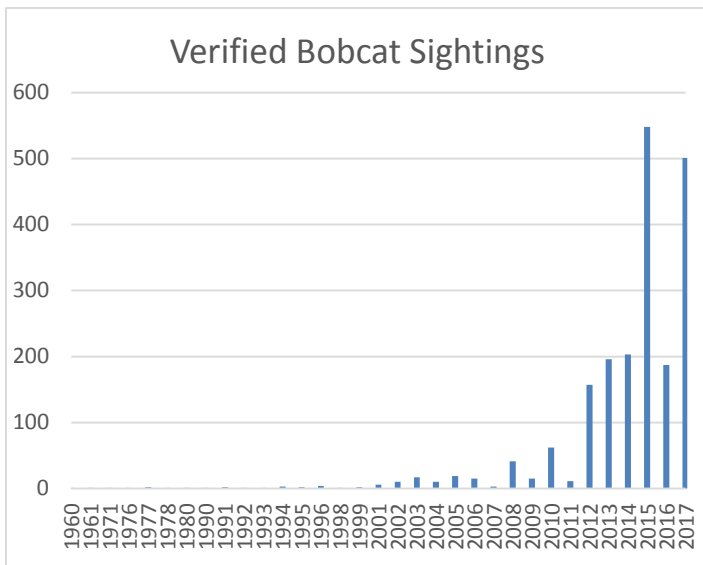


Figure 1. Number of verified bobcat sightings in Ohio, by year.

Ohio had 499 verified bobcat reports in 2017 which included 343 trail camera pictures or videos, 82 road-killed, 12 incidentally trapped bobcats, 34 photographs, and 28 sightings by Ohio Department of Natural Resources staff or other qualified personnel. Bobcat reports were documented in 46 counties during 2017 (Fig. 2) and in 71 counties since 1970.

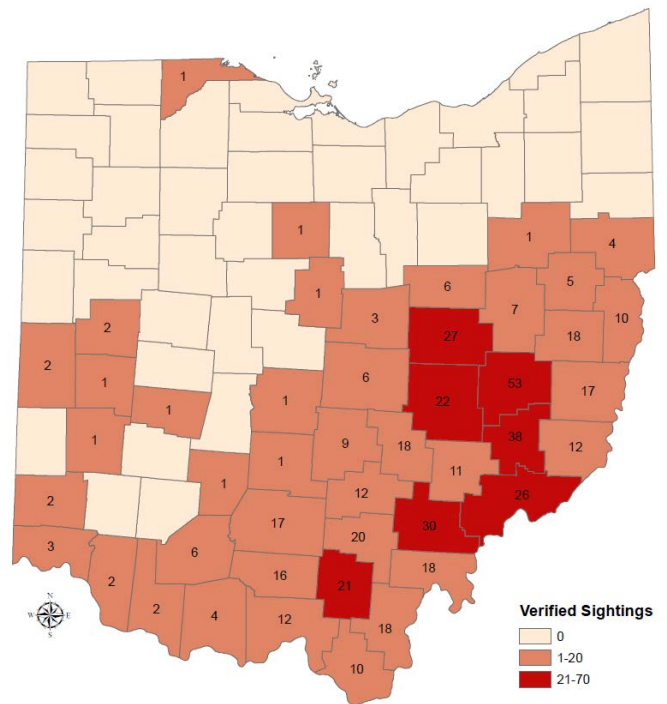


Figure 2. Bobcat sightings in Ohio, by county from 2017.

Bobcat mortality, particularly vehicle-related, has historically been the primary source of verified sightings. Prior to 2006, trail camera photos were a negligible source of sightings. Since that time, however, the number of sightings by trail camera photos has increased dramatically. In 2008, trail camera photographs became the primary source of sightings. It is likely that the growing popularity of trail cameras, as well as the decline in their cost, is largely responsible for the increase in the number of trail camera photos of bobcats. Therefore, this source of data should be interpreted with caution.

The decline in the number of sightings in 2016 is likely due in part to decreased interest in reporting sightings given the bobcat's change in status and subsequent delisting. However, the increase in 2017 may be due to the increased efforts by the Division to solicit bobcat sightings from the public through a wildlife sightings web page.

Given the numerous confounding factors involved in the use of sighting data as an index to relative abundance, the Division of Wildlife is currently working with researchers to estimate the bobcat population in Ohio with genetic sampling, and modeling populations to estimate growth rates.