

Division of Wildlife

Ohio Department of Natural Resources
Waterloo Wildlife Research Station
Athens, OH 45701

17 July 2014

Summary of 2013 Bobcat Observations in Ohio

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 2013, there have been 1,002 verified (e.g., positive identification via roadkill, incidental trappings, etc.) reports of bobcats in Ohio. The bobcat was removed from the Ohio Endangered and Threatened Species List in July 2014, but remains protected (no harvest season). In 1997, a project was initiated by the Division of Wildlife to systematically monitor the status of bobcats in Ohio.

Unverified reports – A total of 2,175 unverified bobcat sightings was received from 1970-2013; 226 of the sightings were received in 2013, compared to 242 unverified reports in 2012. Unverified sightings were reported from 61 counties during 2013 and from 86 counties since 1970 (Fig. 1). Unverified reports in 2013 were obtained primarily through Endangered/Uncommon Species Observation Cards ($n = 137$; 61%).

Verified reports – 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 the best information regarding the distribution and abundance of bobcats in Ohio. Further, they provide an important index of change in annual relative abundance. In situations where the bobcat carcass is available, age, weight, reproductive status of females, and various body measurements are obtained. As such, carcasses provide valuable information concerning the health and reproductive status of Ohio's bobcat population.

Since 1970, there have been 1,009 verified reports of bobcats in Ohio, of which the great majority have occurred since 2000 ($n = 971$; 96%). There were 200 verified bobcat reports in 2013 compared to 169 in 2012. These 200 reports included 113 photographs or videos, 54 roadkills, 21 incidentally trapped bobcats, 7 sightings by Ohio Department of Natural Resources staff or other qualified personnel, 2 struck by trains, 1 observation of tracks, 1 killed by a dog, and 1 bobcat that was shot. Verified bobcat reports were documented in 36 counties during 2013 and in 49 counties since 1970 (Fig. 2). Bobcat sightings during 2013 continue to be highly aggregated. Of the 200 verified reports, 32 (16%) were from Noble County, and 106 (53%) were reported within a 1-county radius of Noble County.

Overall, verified sightings have increased steadily over the past decade (Fig. 3). 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 via trail camera photos has increased dramatically. In 2008, trail camera photographs became the primary source. Other sources of verified sightings, although generally increasing over time, have not shown the same rapid increase (Fig. 4). It is

likely that the growing popularity of trail cameras, as well as the decline in their cost, is largely responsible for the recent increase in the receipt of trail camera photos of bobcats. As such, this source of data is biased and should be interpreted with caution.

We thank Division of Wildlife personnel who were involved in investigating and reporting observations, and collecting and transporting carcasses to District 4 Headquarters.

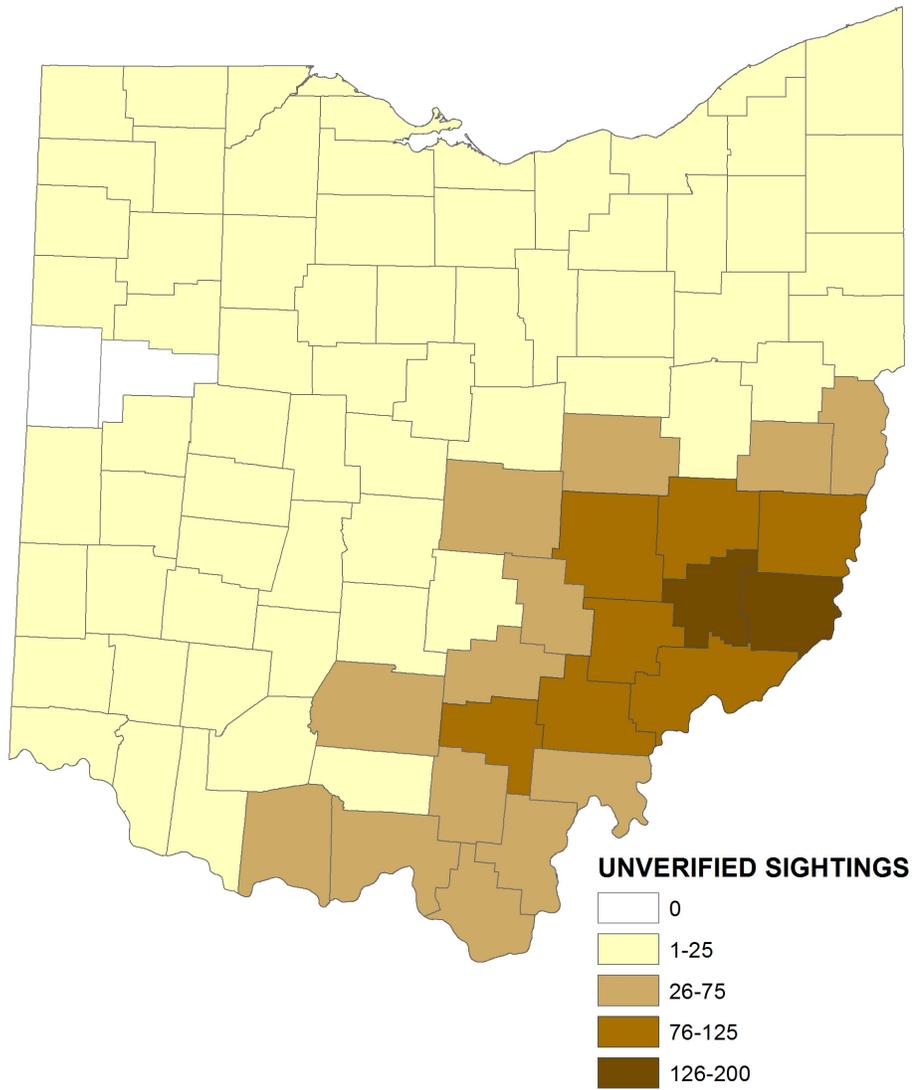


Fig. 1. Unverified bobcat sightings in Ohio by county, from 1970 – 2013.

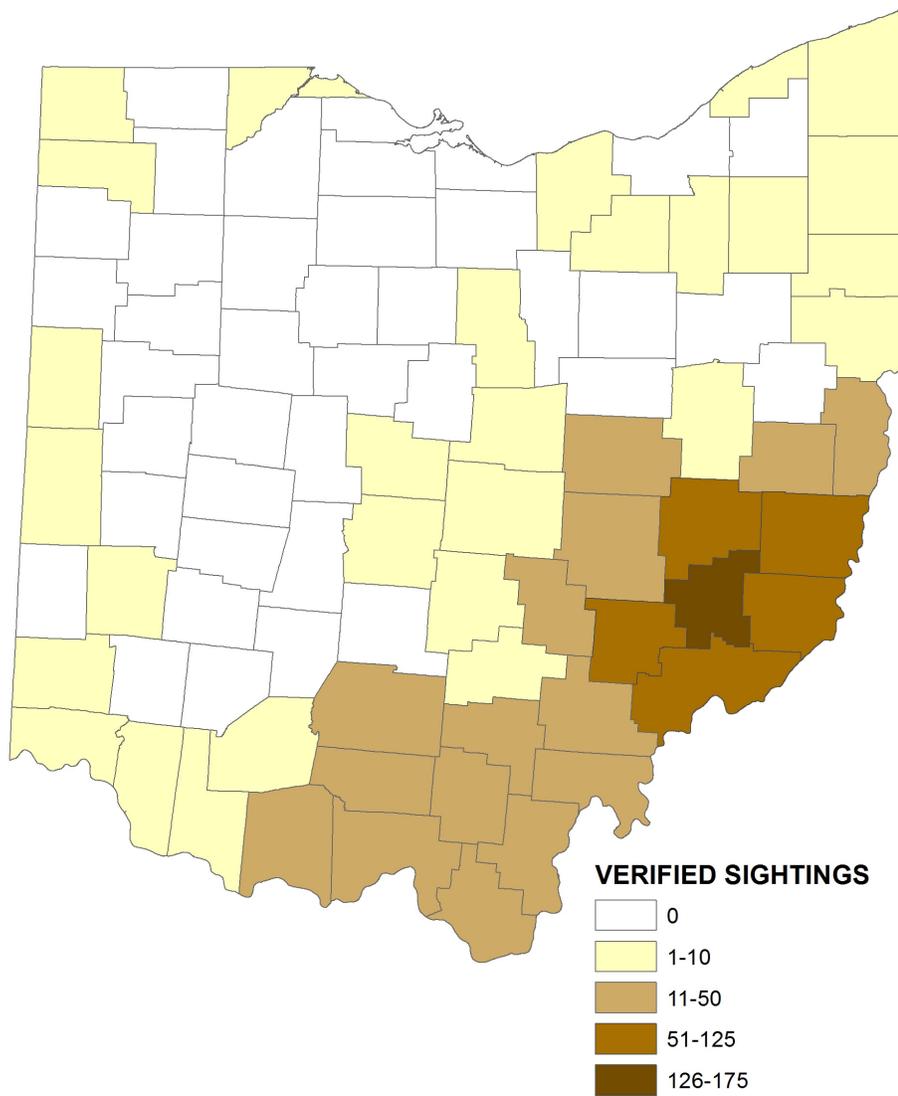


Fig. 2. Verified bobcat sightings in Ohio by county, from 1970 – 2013.

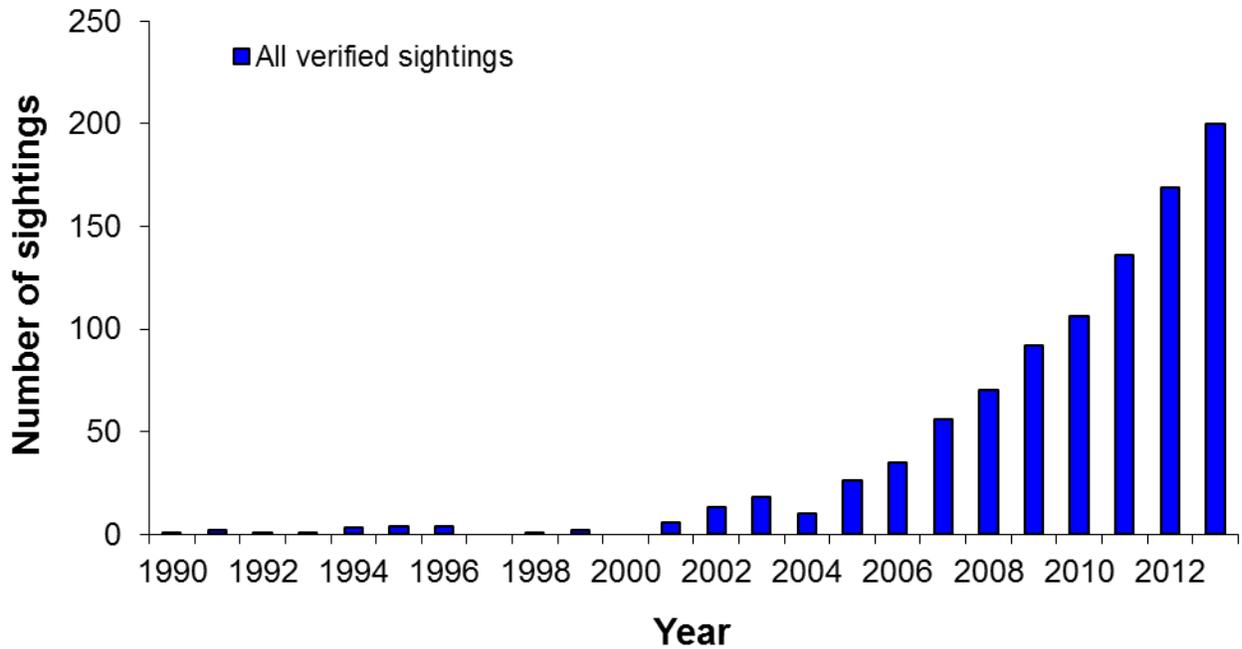


Fig. 3. Total number of verified bobcat sightings in Ohio by year, 1990 – 2013.

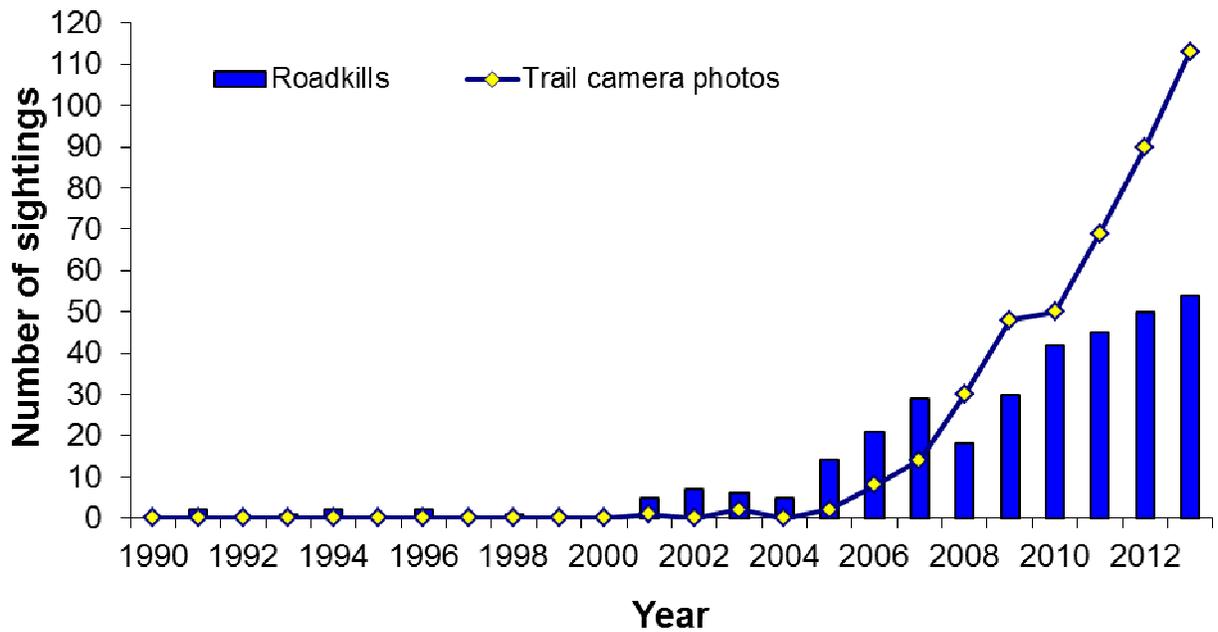


Fig. 4. Number of verified bobcat sightings in Ohio by year and type (trail camera photos vs. roadkill), 1990 – 2013.