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Melanistic Bobcats in Florida

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Melanism in bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) has been documented only in Florida. Paradiso (1973) listed five records, four of which were previously reported by Hamilton (1941) and Ulmer (1941). In an annotated literature review Anderson (1987) listed only Ulmer (1941) as a reference to this phenomenon. Inasmuch as original references are scattered and additional specimens have been obtained since 1971, a summary of melanistic bobcats in Florida is needed.

The 10 known occurrences of melanistic bobcats in Florida are chronologically listed in Table 1 with corresponding locations depicted in Fig. 1. Due to the varying detail of location descriptions the mapped localities should be viewed as approximate. Ulmer's (1941) bobcats came from "... fourteen miles above the mouth of the Loxahatchee River . . .", and "... about 2 miles above . . . the first specimen . . . and close to the point where Kitchen Creek joins the Loxahatchee." Hamilton (1941) referred to a pair trapped "between Clewiston and Belle Glade". Paradiso reported a black bobcat trapped "in the town of Loughman" (near the intersection of Interstate 4 and U.S. 27).

Five melanistic bobcats have been documented since 1971. The remains of a badly decomposed melanistic bobcat in the former Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area were collected in 1983 (Table 1, Fig. 1), and deposited in the collection of the Florida Museum of Natural History. A road-killed melanistic bobcat was collected in 1984 on U.S. 27, 8 miles north of the Dade-Broward County line. This specimen has been mounted for use as an instructional tool by the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission (GFC). In 1985, a road-killed melanistic bobcat was found at the intersection of Interstate 75 and U.S. 27. Another road-killed melanistic bobcat was collected in 1986 at the 34-mile marker on the Florida Turnpike in Dade County. The most recent record of a black bobcat was an

Table 1. Records of melanistic bobcats in Florida, 1939-1990.

Record no. ¹	Month	Year	County	Sex	Reference
1	April	1939	Martin	M	Ulmer 1941
2	January	1940	Martin	F	Ulmer 1941
3	February	1940	Palm Beach	M	Hamilton 1941
4	February	1940	Palm Beach	F	Hamilton 1941
5	October	1970	Polk	F	Paradiso 1973
6 ²	November	1983	Glades	M	Roof, J. ²
7	November	1984	Broward	F	Carlson, K. ²
8	December	1985	Broward	F	Eddie, G. ²
9	May	1986	Dade	M	Kelley, D. ²
10	April	1990	Polk	M	Laing, S. ²

¹Numbers correspond to locations on Fig. 1.

²Collected by Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission personnel.

³Florida Museum of Natural History catalog # 24023.

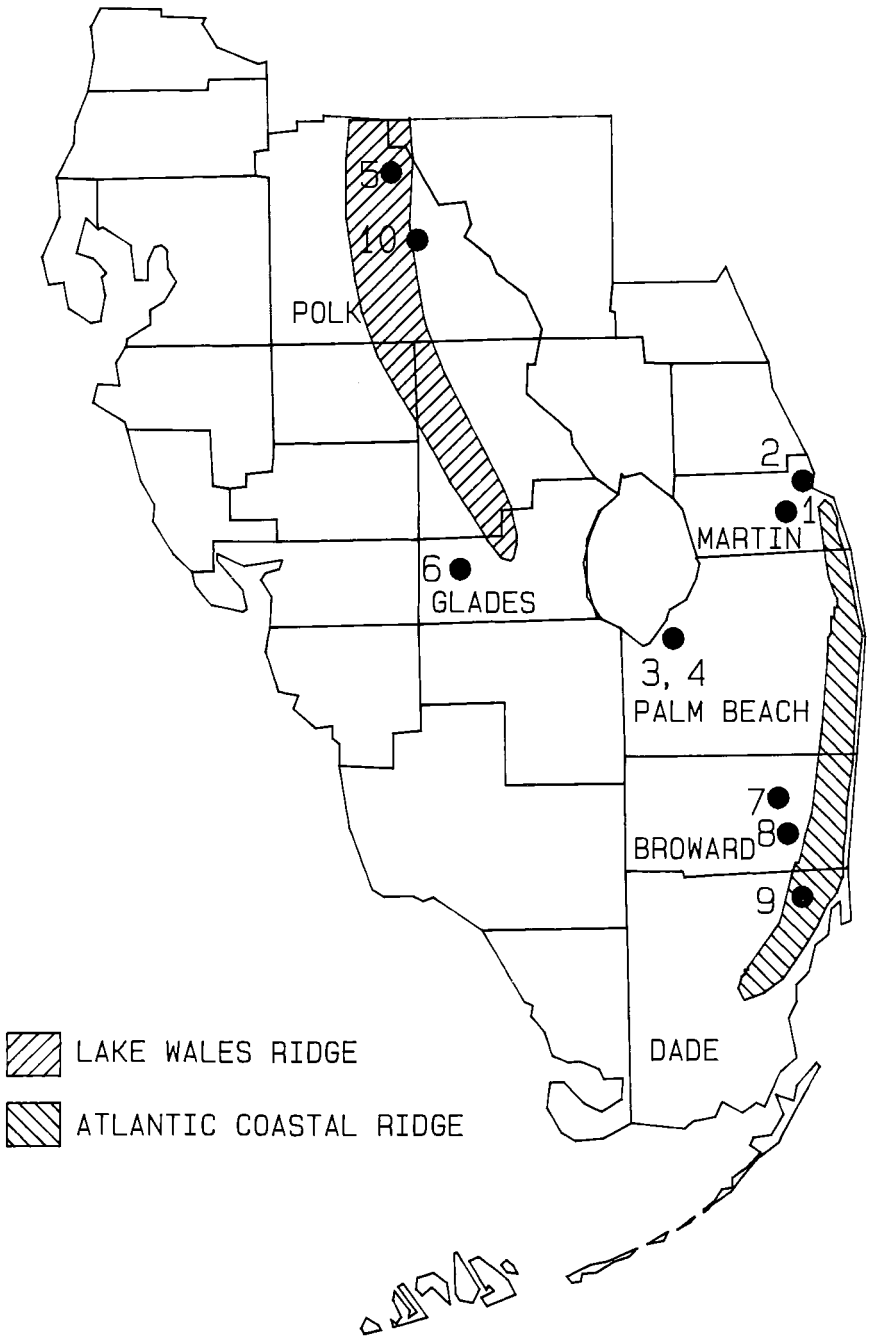


Figure 1. Distribution of black bobcats in Florida, 1939-1990.



Figure 2. A melanistic bobcat captured in Polk County, April 1990 (photo by Steve Laing).

animal accidentally captured in a trap set for raccoons (*Procyon lotor*) in April 1990 by a local resident near Tiger Lake in Polk County, about 3 km north of State Road 60 (Fig. 2). The animal was relocated about 22 km south of its capture site (Laing 1990).

All of the melanistic bobcats known from Florida have been collected, or trapped in southern peninsular Florida. Locations 5, 6 and 10 are located along the Lake Wales Ridge, whereas 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9 parallel the Atlantic Coastal Ridge. Locations 3 and 4 appear to be exceptions but are mid-distant (50 km) between both ridges. Although these ridges are prominent physiographic features in south Florida, they have little, if any, influence on the occurrence of melanistic bobcats. A more likely influence is the occurrence of dark, poorly-drained soils associated with wetlands (e.g. bay swamp, sawgrass marsh) adjacent to scrub ridges. A number of mammal species such as marsh rabbits (*Sylvilagus aquaticus*) exhibit darker forms in less-elevated areas of Florida (Blair 1936).

Numerous casual observations of free-ranging dark cats have been reported throughout Florida, however, specimens or photographs of melanistic bobcats are lacking except for those reported here. Discussions with fur dealers revealed that no black bobcats have been reported in northern Florida counties (P. Crews, Glen St. Mary, pers. comm.; C. Wood, Steinhatchee, pers. comm.). Further, intensive field work associated with panther (*Felis concolor coryi*) and bobcat research in Hendry, Collier and south Dade counties has not produced a black bobcat specimen despite numerous (>200) observations and captures of bobcats in this area (R. McBride, GFC, pers. comm.). Melanism in bobcats may be even more unusual or absent outside of southern peninsular Florida.

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