

A MELANISTIC BOBCAT FROM OUTSIDE FLORIDAJAY W. TISCHENDORF¹ AND DONALD F. MCALPINE²¹*American Ecological Research Institute,—AERIE,
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As is the case for many felids, reports of melanism in the bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) are rare (Robinson 1976, 1978). To date, documented records consist of 10 animals, all from central and southern Florida near the southeastern limit of the species' continental range (Regan and Maehr 1990).

This note documents an additional melanistic bobcat, taken near the northeastern geographic limit of the species in the East and catalogued as #4819 in the New Brunswick Museum (NBM). The specimen, a male, was trapped 18 November 1983 near Henry Lake, Saint John County, New Brunswick (lat. 45° 25', long 65° 37'), and presented in mounted form to the NBM by the New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources and Energy (NBDNRE) (Figure 1).

Like the two Florida specimens described by Ulmer (1941), the New Brunswick bobcat has numerous white guard hairs, although these are scattered throughout the entire pelage and not confined to a dorsal strip as reported by Ulmer (1941). The areas of greatest pigmentation on the New Brunswick cat are the crown and dorsal area. Upon close examination the facial stripes and typical spot-pattern of the flanks are visible.



Figure 1. A Male Melanistic Bobcat.

Melanism has been documented in many felids with a tropical distribution (Caldwell 1925, Ulmer 1941). Regan and Maehr (1990) accordingly speculate that melanism in bobcats is exceedingly rare outside subtropical, peninsular southern Florida. The single New Brunswick record reported here reinforces their contention.

Ulmer (1941) suggested that melanism in Florida bobcats, the darkest form of *Lynx rufus*, might be related to the warm, humid climate of that region, while Regan and Maehr (1990) speculated that melanism in this population is influenced by the "dark, poorly-drained soils associated with wetlands adjacent to scrub ridges." Robinson (1976, 1978) discussed the genetic basis for such pelage variations.

Until now, all records of melanistic bobcats were confined to southern Florida. The New Brunswick specimen discussed here suggests that explanations offered to date may not adequately explain melanism in *Lynx rufus*, and there may be other, unrecognized factors involved.

Reports of melanistic pumas or panthers (*Puma concolor*), are not uncommon in the Northeast and bear some comment relative to the melanistic bobcat reported here. Wright (1972) reviewed the history of puma reports in the Maritime region and found that 18% of them involved black cats. In New Brunswick the frequency was 25%. He concluded that there were in fact a few melanistic pumas in eastern North America. Analysis of more recent puma sightings (1970-1993) in Maritime Canada indicates 13% of such reports involve dark animals (Stocek 1994, in press). Claims of such sightings, however, are typically met with skepticism, despite the documentation of at least one North American case by Barnes (1960), who examined the pelt of a black puma killed in Colorado.

Although some reports of melanistic pumas in New Brunswick can be attributed to dogs, bears, fishers, or melanistic coyotes (R. Cumberland, NBDNRE, pers. comm. confirmed a melanistic coyote as the animal involved in one reported puma sighting), others seem credible. The single record of a melanistic bobcat reported here, however, combined with the long history of bobcat trapping in the region, suggests that few reports of melanistic pumas should be attributed to black bobcats.

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