

## REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN WINTER DIETS OF BOBCATS IN THEIR NORTHERN RANGE

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When generalist predators have wide geographic ranges, diets may differ dramatically, largely as a result of differing prey communities. Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are widely distributed across southern North America, with their northern range edge occurring in southern Canada and in the northern US states. Within this northern range, bobcats are exposed to cold and snowy winters and a limited number of prey species, conditions that are atypical for most of the range of bobcats. We examined winter diets of bobcats in high elevation and very snowy forests in northwest Montana to determine how these generalist predators managed in these harsh conditions in comparison to elsewhere in the northern range. Bobcats consumed 5 major prey types: red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) and Cricetid rodents comprised >78% of the dietary biomass, whereas the larger snowshoe hares (*Lepus americanus*), deer (*Odocoileus* spp.), and grouse were consumed much less often. The standardized niche breadth of bobcat diets was 0.29; bobcats from across the northern range also routinely ate multiple prey species, although eastern bobcats appear to consume more lagomorphs than do western bobcats. These results indicate that bobcats remain generalists in difficult winter conditions while preying primarily on small-bodied prey, although bobcats have highly variable diets across their northern range.