

# Wildlife and Suburban Conflicts with Bobcats and Chickens in West Reno

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## Overview

Wildlife living in the suburban environment can be in conflict with humans living in those areas. For example, humans raising chickens provide a potential easy prey for animals like coyotes, raccoons, and bobcats. During the last three years of camera trapping, we found evidence that bobcats are attracted to chicken coops and will hunt and eat them if given the opportunity. We also found that with proper reinforcement of chicken coops, bobcats are less likely to stay in the area, allowing for an easy solution to reduce conflict with bobcats.

## Introduction

- Although bobcats are present throughout northern Nevada little is known about their presence within a suburban environment, and how they interact with other animals, including chickens.
- Since 2019 we have studied bobcat activity in a suburban environment in West Reno.
- During our camera trapping efforts we found evidence that bobcats are attracted to chicken coops and bird feeders.



Figure 1. Camera trap captured a bobcat walking through a chicken coop before homeowner reinforced it.



Figure 2. Chickens that are free roaming during the day but kept inside a reinforced coop at night to protect from predators



Figure 3. A bobcat that was illegally trapped in West Reno due to her eating the homeowner's chickens



Figure 4. A metal ammo piece from an air rifle found in the battery of a collar that was worn by a collared bobcat

## Results

- Bobcats acquire small mammals such as rabbits and rodents, but we they also eat chickens and visit chicken coops (Fig 1). Feathers have been found at den sites and in fecal matter, further supporting that bobcats hunt and eat chickens in the suburban environment.
- Three out of 4 houses with chicken coops with established camera traps have had sightings of bobcats. Most of the houses have had consistent captures.
- Homeowner testimonials have provided evidence of “lingering” bobcats (they have been observed for continuous days or return to the site regularly). Most had chicken coops and/or bird feeders in their yard.
- People that had reinforced chicken coops did not have bobcat kills, and often do not return to the site (Fig 2).
- **Evidence of other conflict:** In March 2023 one of our previously collared bobcats was illegally cage trapped for eating chickens (Fig 3). When replacing the bobcat's collar we noticed a metal ammo piece inside of the battery of her collar from a pellet gun (Fig 4).

## Methods

- In January 2019 Bushnell camera traps were placed in West Reno to detect bobcats in suburban environments. The camera traps are set to take 3 photos per trigger (motion detected). The pictures collected provide a date, time, and location.
- Photos of bobcats with prey items were documented.
- Photos of bobcat visits at “chicken coop” houses were documented and compared to visits at non-coop houses.
- In September 2022, a citizen scientist form for community members to participate in tracking bobcats in Reno was established. Records of sightings with chicken coops were recorded.
- Data from testimonials from homeowners with chicken coops were also collected.

## Discussion

**Chicken Coop Conflict:** Bobcat diets generally consist of small mammals and birds, which our camera trap data support. We have also observed bobcats become predators of “non-natural” prey, in this case chickens, at several houses and we suspect this is a part of how they have become successful within the suburban environment. This creates conflict that can be resolved with proper reinforcement of coops. In April 2023, we received testimonials from homeowners that successfully reduced this conflict with bobcats. At one home, since the first bobcat appearance, in which they were successful at capturing and killing a single chicken, the homeowner has reinforced their chicken coop and has had no issues since. At another home, since realizing predators were in their backyard (bobcats, hawks), homeowners reinforced the chicken coop. Bobcats have been successful at getting into the yard but has had no issues with them killing chickens due to owners putting the chickens in their coop at night. This supports the idea that even if bobcats have been previously successful at killing chickens, if homeowners are proactive and reinforce their chicken coops, they are less likely to attempt to be able to gain access into the coop. By doing this we can do our part to keep pets, livestock, and wildlife safe and help to co-exist in a suburban environment.

**Other Unfortunate side effects of wildlife in the suburban environment:** In March 2023 one of our previously collared bobcats was illegally captured via cage trap due to her attempt to get into the homeowner's chicken coop. It is believed that the chickens were mostly free-ranged. Once the homeowner realized they had captured a collared bobcat they contacted the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), where we were able to recollar. During the process of recollaring her, we found evidence of that she was shot at, possibly because of her history of getting into chicken coops and living within a suburban area. In Washoe county it is unlawful to discharge any firearm, including air rifles and B-B guns in an unincorporated area within 1,000 feet of any dwelling occupied by another person. We hope with continued research and public outreach, that we can inform homeowners how to reduce conflict so that both wildlife and chickens can coexist with minimal conflict.

## What to Do if a Bobcat is Lingering Around Your Chicken Coop?

If you suspect there is lingering wildlife on your property it is important not to act until obtaining the proper permits for handling/deterring wildlife.

- For more information on living with wildlife call NDOW's Reno location:(775) 688-1506 or visit [www.NDOW.org](http://www.NDOW.org) (Link provided in QR code).

