

Along The Trail

by
ken legg

Wildcats Really Go



Seconds before this picture was snapped, the wildcat which is streaking across the meadow apparently was sleeping. It allowed the photographer to

creep within 15 feet of it before it took off with a velocity which almost defied the camera.

♦ ♦ ♦

By Ken Legg

I think this statement by Harry Walmsley, early naturalist, fits our general opinion of so-called predatory animals: "I learned to realize more and more that, in our ignorance of their motives, we place a totally wrong interpretation upon their actions."

Every bird or animal which is unprotected is termed a predatory creature. The term is erroneous since every meat-eating animal is a predator. Man is the greatest predator the earth has ever known.

When it comes to things economic any animal that competes directly with man, and takes something man himself wishes to take, becomes an undesirable thing. Sportsmen who shoot quail are generally convinced there would be more quail if all bobcats were removed. Logic plays no part in the average layman's reasoning on how wild creatures live. In short, we believe what we want to believe; not facts.

A recent study of the possible extent of predatory effect concentrations of valley quail with reference to the bobcat indicates doubt of the need for predator control to protect quail. Several studies by the department of fish and game, based on stomach analyses, indicate that the staple items of food for the California bobcat are rabbits and smaller rodents.

Many of these rodents, such as the wood rat, are doubtless active predators on quail nests. We have

no paid agent to destroy wood rats, but the bobcat, an unprotected species and one of nature's best rat traps, is vigorously pursued by man and dog.

Misunderstandings of other aspects of the bobcat are also rife among unseasoned human visitors to the haunts of bobcats.

The bobcat bears little resemblance to the mountain lion, yet three year's experience in a park where bobcats could be seen nearly daily, indicated, from the reports received at the gate, that most people thought this stub-tailed cat was a mountain lion. When visitors asked what animals were in the park, and in listing them I spoke the electric word "bobcat", their eyes widened, they peered furtively into the bushes, and some of them didn't want to go anywhere except back to their cars. They immediately began to think of the park as a dangerous place, and often, very much surprised, asked: "You allow those things in here?"

All of which leads me up to the incident surrounding the obtaining of the rather obscure photo illustrating this article, and an account written just after the incident.

The female wildcat raced across the meadow and up the slope, her belly low and swaying, heavy with the weight of unborn kittens.

Two weeks later I saw her again, this time facing away from me and into a strong wind. She was tense, intent upon a mouse in the grass. Nervously she advanced; slowly, one paw at a time, and as she watched and waited, I, in broad daylight advanced too. Advanced with my camera ready to what I hoped would be within 40 or 50 feet. But the wind took away my scent and rustled the sound from my slowly moving feet

Stolen Cars Are Object Of Police Search

Police hope an all points bulletin alerting law enforcement agencies throughout the state to watch for a car stolen here will produce results.

The vehicle — a 1951 Buick hardtop with a maroon body and light gray top, owned by Joseph Colotorti of Stockton—was taken from Leibbrandt avenue Friday afternoon.

A short time later Deputy Sheriff Ken Titus, driving to work on the freeway, noticed a car of the same description. He didn't know at the time that a stolen car was being sought, but his attention was drawn to the youthful appearance of the driver.

He jotted down the license number just in case. Later it was found to be that of the stolen car. Titus also took the number of a 1951 Chevrolet traveling with the stolen car and driven by another 15-18-year-old youth.

Records show the second car was registered to Fred Rea of Gilroy. Police and highway patrolmen are scanning roads to the south of Santa Cruz county for the two vehicles.

A snake can travel best on a rough surface and can make little progress on a smooth one.

so that I stopped not 50, not 40, but 15 feet from this hunting wild creature. Two thoughts ran through my mind, getting the camera adjusted and taking mental notes on this animal before me. Both are a little hazy now. I saw only the back, rear end, and back of her head. It looked all black and white. The tips of the ears were black, below was a larger white portion. The tail was about six inches long, also black and white, as were the hind legs. All the while she kept twitching the stubby tail, and at intervals a shudder of excitement shook her whole hind quarters.

I was so close I had the urge to reach out and touch her just to see if I could touch a wild, wildcat. Her body was gaunt, thin—her hip bones and ribs showed like ridges beneath the skin and the thought came to me that this animal was decrepit. The picture could have been snapped then but would only have shown the back of a wildcat. Since I'd gotten so close, I thought she must be ill and I could maneuver at will for pictures. There was, however, some doubt in my mind.

Many times before I have surprised other wild animals from behind and had them turn their head to look as I made some slight sound. This was what I wanted now so I gave a low squeak. Either it wasn't low enough or I was too close, for she never looked up. A black and white cat crouched flat upon the ground and became a yellow cat. I saw nothing except a face the same color as the dead grass surrounding it. Still I didn't snap my picture, for I could barely see her though only 15 feet away and she lay, it seemed, at my feet. For a part of a second the thought of a decrepit animal flashed across my mind. Then though my eyes were glued to the face in the grass I never saw her leave. The next thing I knew she was half way across the meadow, and I swung my camera wildly and clicked the shutter.

This will go down in my outdoor recollections as one of the most amazing movements I ever expect to witness. A mallard leaping into the air is as a vulture laden with carrion and a deer moves like an oxen by comparison with this bundle of fur which certainly must have put the cat in the word catapult.

"Just a big pussy with a bob-