

Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004

Guidance on the keeping of Lynx, Wildcats and Bobcats



**Environment &
Heritage Service**

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- 1. Species Names**

Lynx (Felis) lynx – Lynx, Northern or Eurasian lynx
Lynx (Felis) canadensis – Canadian lynx
Lynx (Felis) pardinus – Iberian lynx
Lynx (Felis) rufus – Bobcat
Felis silvestris - Wildcat
- 2. Additional information**

All members of the cat family, except for the domestic cat, require a licence under this legislation.

If you propose to keep a small cat species not listed above, please contact the Department of the Environment for further advice.
- 3. Housing overview**

Lynx, wildcats and bobcats are temperate species, and in general they live and hunt on the ground. They are usually kept in outdoor enclosures, but should have some form of shelter to protect them from extremes of weather.
- 4. Conservation status**

Felis lynx, *Felis pardinus* and *Felis silvestris* are classified as Annex A species under EC Regulation 338/97 (relating to the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)).

Special permits must be obtained to buy, sell, breed or use Annex A species for any commercial purpose.

- 5. Keeping experience** In order to protect the welfare of these animals, keepers must be able to demonstrate a good knowledge of husbandry and handling of the species they wish to keep.

There should normally be a second named person nominated and included on the licence who is competent to care for the animals should the owner be absent or incapacitated.

Housing Recommendations

- 6. Construction** Most cat species are excellent climbers and it is recommended that outdoor enclosures have a roof. Enclosures are normally made from wooden posts and wire mesh. Any concrete or artificial flooring should be non-slip.

It is recommended that the floor of outdoor enclosures is covered in a mulch-type substrate such as bark chips or wood chippings to provide interest for the cats.

- 7. Fencing** Fencing for enclosures must be strong enough to withstand the weight of the cats climbing on it, and the mesh size used must be small enough to prevent the animals becoming entangled. If the enclosure fencing is the only means of separation from visitors, it is strongly recommended that the mesh size is small enough to prevent people putting their fingers through it.

The fencing should ideally be set into concrete foundations to prevent the cats digging underneath, and also to prevent predators digging in. All fencing should be well maintained.

8. Size

The minimum recommended space requirements are:

4m length x 2m width x 2.5m high (13 ft x 6 ft 6 in x 8 ft) for a single animal.

The larger lynx species (the European Lynx) will require more space than this.

Any additional animals will require a further 50% increase in floor space.

Consideration should also be given to paragraphs 14 and 18 when designing the animals' enclosure.

9. Temperature and Shelter

Normal outdoor temperatures in Northern Ireland should be tolerable for these cat species, however all cats in outdoor enclosures should be provided with at least one draught-free den each, with sufficient clean bedding in which to sleep, hide, and shelter from extreme weather. Additional bedding may need to be provided if temperatures drop below 10°C (50°F). In general, lynx enjoy snow.

10. Lighting

Whilst most small cats are usually more active during the night, they must be provided with some form of natural lighting during the day. The light should be sufficient to allow the keeper to clean and maintain the enclosure easily. The hours of daylight influences the breeding cycle of many cats, and so naturalistic lighting regimes (i.e. the natural lengthening and shortening of daylight hours through the year) are recommended for cats intended for breeding.

- 11. Ventilation** No ventilation is required in outdoor enclosures.
- 12. Drainage** The drainage of the outdoor enclosures must be capable of rapidly removing all excess water. Drains should be designed to avoid injury to the animals. Any open drains, other than those carrying surface water, should be outside the enclosure. Any faecal material must be disposed of in an environmentally sound manner.
- 13. Cleanliness** Outdoor enclosures should be maintained in a clean state, with faeces, food debris and litter being removed on a regular basis. Since cats “scent mark” by rubbing their cheeks and head and urinating on their enclosures, thorough disinfection of the outdoor enclosures should be done sparingly.

14. Social dynamics and behavioural considerations

All species of small wild cats are solitary in nature, and are intolerant of adults of the same sex; however breeding pairs may live together. It is therefore recommended that these cats are not kept together in large groups although pairs of lynx-type cats are usually reasonably tolerant of each other.

If a group of cats is kept together, there should be several visual barriers to allow the animals to hide from one another.

Although lynx, wildcats and bobcats spend most of their time on the ground, they enjoy climbing, and will appreciate high perches. It is recommended that some provision is made for the cats to express their normal climbing behaviour.

If more than one cat is kept in an enclosure, some provision should be made to separate them if necessary.

15. Prevention of escape

A double door with a space of approximately 2m² (18 ft²) separating the two gates should be erected at the entrance to outdoor enclosures, allowing the keeper to enter without a risk of the animals escaping. Both gates should be padlocked.

The public must not be able to gain access to the perimeter of the enclosure – this may require the erection of a secondary fence. Signs warning of the danger should be erected.

16. Food, drink and bedding

In general, small exotic cats share the same food requirements as domestic cats. A high quality complete cat food, or a varied meat diet, including some whole prey items such as rabbits or day-old chicks, may be provided. The feeding exclusively of moist cat food will lead to dental problems.

Fresh drinking water should be provided at all times.

Bedding material in the dens can include wood chips, wood wool, or straw. The provision of more than one den is advisable, as some cats will use one den as a toileting area and one to sleep in. Each cat should be provided with a raised sleeping platform.

17. Visiting interval

The animals must be monitored at appropriate intervals, normally at least once every 24 hours.

- 18. Exercise and enrichment**
- The provision of enrichment items to provide the animals with interest and opportunity to exercise is extremely important for small cats. These species enjoy climbing, and so there should be plenty of opportunity to express this behaviour within the enclosure. This may be achieved by the use of trees, logs, platforms or commercially available “cat gyms”.
- Other suitable enrichment would include the use of novel feeding methods (hiding the food around the enclosure or using different food items) and by including plants (which may be eaten!) into the enclosure.
- The more complex the enclosure can be, the less likely the cats are to display abnormal behaviours such as pacing.
- 19. Provision for capture and transportation**
- Lynx, wildcats and bobcats may be transported to a veterinary surgeon in a locked cat or dog cage. A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify restrictions on the movement of these animals and procedures to be followed.
- 20. Emergency planning**
- There should be a written contingency plan in place to be used in the event of an emergency, for example fire, flood, animal escape or injury to the keeper.

21. Notification Requirements

A licence, issued by the Department of the Environment, for the keeping of these animals may specify procedures to be followed in the event of an escape and on the provision of information to the Emergency Services (e.g. the Fire Service) on the dangerous wild animals being kept.

You are required to notify the Department of the Environment of any intentions to breed the animals.

22. Prevention and control of spread of infectious disease

Provision should be made to allow the separation of sick or injured animals if more than one animal is kept in an enclosure. Temporary isolation can be achieved using a large, lockable plastic dog crate or similar.

The keeper should provide details of their veterinary arrangements with a practice prepared to treat these animals. A schedule of veterinary care, including vaccination and routine parasite control is required, and the keeping of records of veterinary attention is essential. These animals are at serious risk of feline diseases.

Animals acquired from outside the United Kingdom may be subject to rabies quarantine regulations. Anyone requiring further information should contact the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

There are no transmissible diseases carried by these animals that pose a risk to the general public as long as there is no direct contact, and visitors are not allowed to handle the animals or their by-products. Keepers should be aware of the risks of Toxoplasmosis, a potentially harmful parasite that may be transmitted to humans through cat faeces. For this reason, good hygiene practices should be always observed when handling cats, or cleaning their enclosures.

Explanatory Notes

These notes have been produced to provide people wishing to keep dangerous wild animals with guidance on the requirements they may have to meet. In determining whether or not a licence should be issued, the Department of the Environment will consider the information provided by the applicant when applying for a licence. The Department will also arrange for a suitably qualified person to carry out an inspection of the premises at which the animal or animals will be kept and the inspector's report will also be taken into consideration. It is at the Department's discretion to waive certain recommendations, or add additional ones, to the guidance provided in this document. There is a right to appeal within 21 days if a licence is refused or if the applicant contests conditions applied to a licence.

Contact Information

For further information on the Dangerous Wild Animals (Northern Ireland) Order 2004, contact the Department of the Environment, Environment & Heritage Service, Biodiversity Unit on 028 9054 6502

For CITES enquiries:

Wildlife Licensing and Registration
Service
Global Wildlife Division
**Department for Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs**
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2 The Square, Temple Quay
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For rabies quarantine enquiries:

Quarantine Section
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