



photo submitted by Adam Petry

Senior Adam Petry started a project to capture, collar and track the movement patterns of bobcats in the Midwest. He said he began the project after calling the Missouri Department of Conservation and realizing how little it knew about the animal.



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Senior Adam Petry holds a bobcat in April 2004 during his fieldwork. He said that now he is focused on analyzing the data he has collected after collaring five males and one female.

Project involves field research

Senior works in field after discovering how little is known of bobcats in Midwest

Naomi Davis
Staff Reporter

It's hard enough to have a pet in college other than a fish or hamster. One Truman student, however, has made a job of supervising 25-pound cats.

Adam Petry, a senior biology major, has been at work on a project involving the capture and monitoring of bobcats in the local area since June.

His research focuses on the movement patterns of bobcats within the rural environment.

"I want to find out more about them and their habitat," Petry said. "The Midwest is the corn belt of the nation. You never associate a huge elusive predator with a large cornfield. What the heck are they doing here?"

Petry said his major tasks are to capture, sedate and collar the bobcats. The animals then are released and allowed to continue living in their natural habitat. The trackers then drive the country-

side in trucks, tracking the bobcats and noting how the habitat is being used. Petry said he looks at such features as how the bobcat uses its time, what it is eating and if it crosses roads.

A recent change in state law that now includes northeast Missouri in the permitted areas for bobcat hunting sparked Petry's interest in the project.

"I called the Missouri Department of Conservation to find the bobcat population per county," he said. "They told me there was about one bobcat per county. I thought, 'That's all, you know?' It intrigued me. You don't know how the population is doing, and you're letting people go out and kill them."

Petry said his project began through a friend who worked at the campus mammology lab who had an interest in bobcat trapping.

After his friend graduated and left the equipment behind, Petry said he saw the opportunity to get out of the classroom and put the project into motion with his adviser, Scott Burt, professor of biology.

Burt said he went out in the field with Petry in the beginning but had no success in capturing the animals. The

team then hired a worker from the conservation department to assist with the trapping. Burt said he thinks the project is one people will be interested in.

"People are fascinated with carnivores," Burt said. "They really attract people's attention."

Burt supervises several other projects, including work with bat elocution calls and research on the HANTA virus with Missouri rodents. He said this is the first time he has worked with bobcats, and their population is a sign of a healthy ecosystem.

"They are beautiful animals," he said. "Every one that was captured I got to help collar."

About whether these large animals pose a threat to the general population, Petry said he hasn't had any accidents thus far.

"We still have all of our fingers," he said. "The most dangerous part is capturing them, but there haven't been any issues. Bobcats will shy away from people,

so hiking around here isn't dangerous."

Five males and one female have been captured, and Petry said that because males and females have different movement patterns, minimal data exists for comparison. Petry said he has compared the local bobcat population, in which the animals have large areas of movement because of less-populated areas, to areas of larger population in Illinois, where the bobcats are more densely populated.

Petry said the home range for the bobcats spans areas west of Kirksville, about 15 minutes away from Truman. Petry said the hilly areas west of town, near Novinger, Mo. and Greencastle, Mo., are more favorable environments than the flatter, grassier areas in the eastern direction.

Senior biology major Kelly Arcipowski joined Petry in the field during the summer, tracking the bobcats, using antennas and a receiver to pick up their

location, and mapping out their coordinates. Arcipowski said she worked four to five days a week for two to four hours each on a regular basis, depending on how many bobcats were being tracked.

"Sometimes we would follow just one for six hours," Arcipowski said. "They move around a lot, so you're constantly trying to keep up with them, and when you saw them it was great."

Despite the presence of these animals in the surrounding area, Petry said the bobcats would be extremely hard to find without his tracking devices.

"If I went out every day without my equipment telling me where they are for a year, I wouldn't see a single one," he said. "And if I did, there would be no interaction. People see them for a split second, and they're gone. They stay away from humans and environmental pressures."

Petry said he continues to conduct research twice a week although the project is now more focused on analyzing the data rather than field work.

More information can be found at the project's Web site, <http://bobcats.truman.edu>.

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