

Bobcat's brush with death is a tail with a happy ending



The ordeal began that Friday night when the bobcat apparently tried to cross Nicasio Valley Road. **Cory Simon**, 33, of Nicasio spotted the cat in the middle of the southbound lane as he drove home after having dinner with his sister in Petaluma following his shift in the tasting room at Raymond Vineyards in St. Helena.

“It was clearly freshly hit,” said Simon, who drove over what he thought was a carcass, but did not hit it with his wheels. “I noticed something was weird, so I turned around and put my lights on it. I saw it take a breath.”

Simon took off his white dress shirt and scooped up the animal, which he thought was a house cat until he saw its sinewy muscles and distinctive bobtail. It had blood coming out of its nose and a badly swollen eye, but did not appear to have any internal injuries, he said.

“It was borderline unconscious when I picked it up, and it began to purr — more like a very light rumble — when I petted it,” Simon said. “It was pretty cool. You don’t really get to handle wildlife often. How often do you get to handle a bobcat?”

Simon placed the bobcat on his passenger seat and turned on the seat heater to try to warm it up as he drove home. Animal care workers with the **Marin Humane Society** met him within 20 minutes of his call.

“I like cats, and I’m a huge nature lover,” Simon said. “But I come from a family that’s hunted quite a bit, so I’ve dealt with death. There was no surrealism. It was just, this is an animal that needs help, so I helped it.”

The cat, which weighs only 7 pounds, was treated for head trauma, a severely damaged right eye, a broken left foot, and numerous cuts and abrasions at the WildCare trauma center, where she was given the prosaic name No. 1722. Veterinarians were thankful there were no skull or pelvis fractures.

The bobcat was in intensive care for about a week and recuperated at **Sonoma County Wildlife Rescue** in Petaluma, where she spent the bulk of her time growling angrily and lunging, claws out, at her handlers.

“She’s a small bobcat, not much bigger than a real house cat,” said Hermance, who believes the cat is between 6 and 9 months old. “She’s made a full recovery, and you can tell she can see out of the eye, which is tracking properly.”

Late Thursday afternoon came No. 1722’s big moment. Brittany Morse, the WildCare clinic’s manager, placed a cage with the bobcat in it in a grassy field, then opened the door.

For several minutes, the animal just growled. Then suddenly, she bolted out, veered left toward the assembled onlookers, darted right and took off at top bobcat speed into the tall brush.

“Oh my God,” Hermance said.

Bobcats are the most common wildcat in North America. The predators, which are larger than house cats and smaller than the lynx, are named for their short, bobbed tail.

They mainly hunt rabbits, but also eat rodents, birds and young pigs or other mammals. There are between 725,000 and 1 million bobcats in the wild in North America, but nobody really knows how many there are in California. The state’s rough estimate is 70,000.

The biggest threat to bobcats is the fact that their beige coats, which often contain dark brown spots or lines, are valuable overseas. Trappers once killed as many as 1,500 bobcats a year in California to satisfy the Chinese and Russian desire for the lush pelts, which sell for as much as \$2,100 apiece, according to wildlife advocates.

California has passed several laws in recent years protecting bobcats, including one that banned commercial trapping. The laws, however, do not ban recreational hunting or efforts to control problem bobcats, which sometimes kill chickens and other small farm animals.

In 2014, the **California Fish and Game Commission** made it illegal to offer a prize, inducement or reward for killing predators, including bobcats.

Simon, who purports to like animals more than most people, said he is honored to have had the chance to save a member of such a majestic and beautiful species.

“This is an apex predator in a beautiful environment,” Simon said. “I’m pretty stoked that it’s going to stay around.”