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Give housecats a wild lifestyle

I recently had the great experience of watching a bobcat play at Pelican Hill golf course. We weren't expecting to see one during our round, but the course was pretty empty, and when



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we walked up to the 16th tee box, we saw something on the green.

At first we weren't sure what the animal was, but range-finding golf binoculars gave us a better look at the bobcat about 140 yards away. It was hard to tell how large the bobcat was, but he looked about 3 feet long.

The most interesting part of observing the bobcat was how similarly he played to a domestic housecat. He was leaping and running in circles. We saw him throw something up in the air, then bat it around. We think it was a baby rabbit. Next we saw him rolling on his back and stretching

for several minutes. Finally, he jumped in the sand trap next to the green and darted around.

We watched for a few more minutes, got in our cart and drove up to the green. Unfortunately, he dashed into the bushes before I could record anything on my cell-phone camera. We saw paw prints in the sand. It didn't look like he'd been using the sand trap as a litter box. There was no trace of the rabbit.

I did a little research on bobcats and found out that they are most active around dawn and dusk. (It was close to sunset when we saw the bobcat.) Bobcats do a lot of spraying to mark their territory. Males don't let other males in their territory but do allow females. Rabbits – of which there are plenty at golf courses – can be their favorite food. No wonder the bobcat was hanging around.

Although my housecats don't go out and hunt, they play with fur mice toys just like the bobcat. They run around, flick the toy in the

air, bat it around, and then pick it up in their mouths. After they are finished playing, they stretch out and roll on their backs. Play behavior is instinctual in both domestic and wild cats.

Some owners think their cat is aggressive or bothersome when he jumps and attacks things, including hands and feet. The cat is just doing what is normal, and an owner's job is to redirect this play behavior to appropriate outlets. Don't let the cat bite, scratch, or attack you. Get toys that you can throw, things on strings, or stuffed animals or socks the cat can jump on and bite. Cats need to go through simulated hunts to satisfy their instincts.

A lot of housecat problems arise from behaviors that are normal to all cats – hunting, spraying, nocturnal activity, and scratching. Instinctually, cats want to do all of these things, so it is important to create an environment where your cat isn't stressed and doesn't feel like he has to mark his territory with spraying or

scratching.

Bored or stressed housecats are the ones that typically behave in ways their owners want to change. Boredom comes from a lack of stimulation – no interactive play with humans or other animals, nothing to watch out the window, and no toys the cat wants to play with.

The College of Veterinary Medicine at Ohio State University hosts a website – vet.ohio-state.edu/indoorcat.htm – to help enrich the lives of indoor cats. It's worth a look if you want to help your cat enjoy his life.

The bobcat that I observed was neither stressed nor bored. He was just doing what came naturally to him. If your housecat exhibits a behavior that you don't want in your home, get professional advice about how to redirect the behavior at an early stage, when there is a higher likelihood that it can be changed.

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