

## Vets nurse sick bobcat, return it to park where it's needed

October 7 2017, by Russ Bynum

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A few minutes before they opened the pet carrier on a sandy trail near the beach, the veterinarians heard a piercing growl from inside the cage. Their patient was ready to go home.

"He's definitely still wild," Dr. Meredith Persky remarked.

A firm tap on the back of the carrier was all it took Friday for the 15-pound (6.8-kilogram) bobcat to bolt down the trail and vanish among the palmetto fronds on Jekyll Island, where park staffers had made extra efforts to save one of the island's rarest predators after hikers found the [wild cat](#) lying paralyzed nearly two weeks earlier.

Located off the Georgia coast about 70 miles (112 kilometers) south of Savannah, Jekyll Island is a state park that's teeming with deer and other wildlife thanks to a state law that keeps two-thirds of the island undeveloped. But it's home to few predators, mostly alligators and rattlesnakes.

Bobcats, while common elsewhere in Georgia, hadn't been seen on Jekyll Island in about a century until 2014, when a remote camera used to monitor wildlife on the island captured an image of an adult male. Two years later, the cameras photographed another adult bobcat, this time a female, with two kittens.

It was one of the younger cats, estimated to be roughly 1 1/2 years old now, that hikers found in late September lying in the sand and unable to

move its rear legs, said Joseph Colbert III, Jekyll Island's wildlife manager. That was the first time anybody had seen one of the bobcats up close.

Colbert said he knew immediately the wild cat had to be very sick. Bobcats are elusive animals that tend to avoid humans whenever possible.

"The bobcat is one of the rarest animals we have on the island," Colbert said of the decision to try to save the animal. "They're a natural predator, and every ecological system needs [natural predators](#)."

The paralyzed bobcat was wrapped in towels, sedated and driven to the Jacksonville Zoo, where Persky works in neighboring Florida. The cat had no injuries to explain its condition, she said, but vets removed dozens of ticks from behind its ears to the spaces between its toes.

The bobcat rebounded in a few days. Persky said vets concluded the paralysis was likely caused by a toxin secreted by the ticks.

"It's a rare thing, and very rare in cats," Persky said.

Jekyll Island staffers will be keeping tabs on the bobcat—in part to monitor its recovery, but also to learn more about where it goes on the island. The cat was released wearing a collar fitted with a GPS tracker that Colbert said will provide daily updates on its position. He said the tracker's battery should last eight months to a year.

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