

NRRI

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News

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CAPTIVE LYNX HELP SCIENTISTS LEARN MORE

Videotaping movement adds new layer to Canada lynx study

DULUTH, MINN.--Two young Canada lynx, Lily and June, have been given the job of helping scientists gather more information about their species and the life they lead in Minnesota. These two 16-month-old cats were hand-fed from birth and are too accustomed to people to live in the wild—yet, as wild animals, do not make good house pets. Lily and June are now being cared for at the Wildlife Science Center in Forest Lake.

Since last week they've been wearing GPS collars similar to the type used on lynx in the wild that are being monitored as part of an ongoing study of the Canada Lynx population in Minnesota. Right now, three wild lynx are wearing GPS (global positioning system) collars and nine are wearing radiotelemetry collars. The study of lynx in the wild is conducted by UMD's Natural Resources Research Institute with support from the USDA Forest Service, the USGS Biological Resources Division, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Lily and June are being videotaped to allow the scientists to correlate an activity counter in the GPS collars with what the cats are actually doing. A motion detector in the collar senses every time the cat moves, or stops moving, and records the data. Video cameras in their cages, similar to store security cameras, capture footage of their actual movement. This information makes it possible to interpret activity counts of free-ranging Canada lynx, building the knowledge base about where and how the wild cats are surviving.

This is the first study of Canada lynx using GPS locating devices. Technological advances have reduced the size of GPS units so that they're small enough not to hinder the movements of the cats, which weigh around 28 pounds. Wildlife Science Center Director, Peggy Callahan, confirmed that Lily and June are not bothered by the collars.

"After the initial sniffing and scratching and being curious, their behavior and movement didn't change at all," said Callahan.

This summer, the scientists found three litters of Canada lynx kittens in Minnesota. Canada lynx have been scarce in Minnesota since 1984 and were listed as a "threatened species" under the Endangered Species Act in 2000.

The public is encouraged to notify the project biologists if a lynx is sighted by calling 1-800-234-0054 or by sending an e-mail to lynx@nrri.umn.edu. The project can be followed on the project Web site at www.nrri.umn.edu/lynx.

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VIDEO: 8 minutes

Still Photo credit UMD-NRRI