



Ohio Bobcat Sightings Report

September 2021

Bobcats historically occurred in Ohio but were extirpated by the mid-1800s due to habitat loss and overharvest. From 1850 through the 1960s, there were occasional reports of bobcats, mainly in eastern Ohio. Bobcat sighting reports provide a means for the Ohio Division of Wildlife to track changes in bobcat occurrence in the state over time. Prior to the year 2000, the division never received more than five confirmed sightings in one year. In the early 2000s, bobcat sightings started to become a more frequent occurrence, as populations in neighboring states (Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Kentucky) began expanding into Ohio. The number of bobcats observed each year quickly accelerated, and bobcats can now be found throughout southeast and southern Ohio, with occasional confirmed sightings extending into northeast, central, and western Ohio.

Bobcat sighting reports include observations reported to the Division of Wildlife by members of the public and observations made by Division of Wildlife personnel while in the field. Sightings are screened to eliminate duplicates (i.e. multiple reports from the same location within the same

month) or sightings that are confirmed to be a species other than bobcat (e.g. housecat). If evidence is available to confirm that the species observed was in fact a bobcat, we classify it as a confirmed sighting, otherwise the sighting is considered unconfirmed.

2018, 2019, and 2020 Bobcat Sightings*

The number of confirmed bobcat sightings reported were similar in 2019 and 2020, and slightly lower in 2018 (Figure 1). In 2020, 1,041 bobcat sightings were reported to the Division of Wildlife, 521 of which were confirmed (520 unconfirmed). In 2019, fewer sightings were reported overall (991 total sightings), however the number of confirmed reports was similar (530 confirmed, 461 unconfirmed). In 2018, 969 sightings were reported and 442 confirmed (527 unconfirmed).

We used the location of confirmed sightings (address or GPS coordinates) to identify locations where multiple sightings were made within the same year. In 2018, 395 confirmed sightings were at independent locations, while the remaining 47 were sightings at a duplicate location on a different

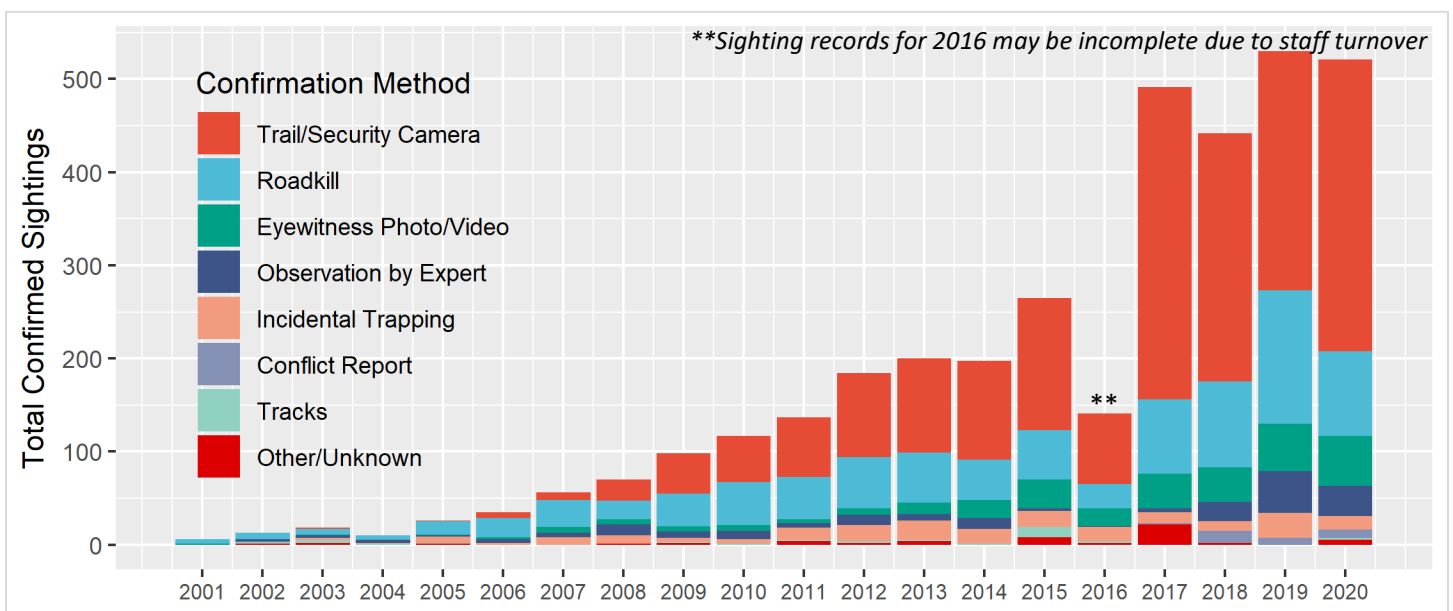


Figure 1. Total confirmed bobcat sightings by year and confirmation method in Ohio from 2001 through 2020.

*Note: This report contains information from all sightings reported to the Ohio Division of Wildlife prior to May 19, 2021. Sightings reported after this date will be reflected in future versions of this report.

date. In 2019, 490 confirmed sightings were at independent locations, and the remaining 40 were at a duplicate location. In 2020, 472 confirmed sightings were at independent locations, and the remaining 49 were at a duplicate location within the same year.

For the purposes of this report, multiple bobcats observed at the same time were considered one

sighting. Bobcats are generally solitary animals, except when females are accompanied by kittens or subadult offspring, or for short periods of time when breeding. Using photos, we were able to confirm the presence of multiple bobcats for 29 sightings in 2018, 20 sightings in 2019, and 27 sightings in 2020 (Figure 2).

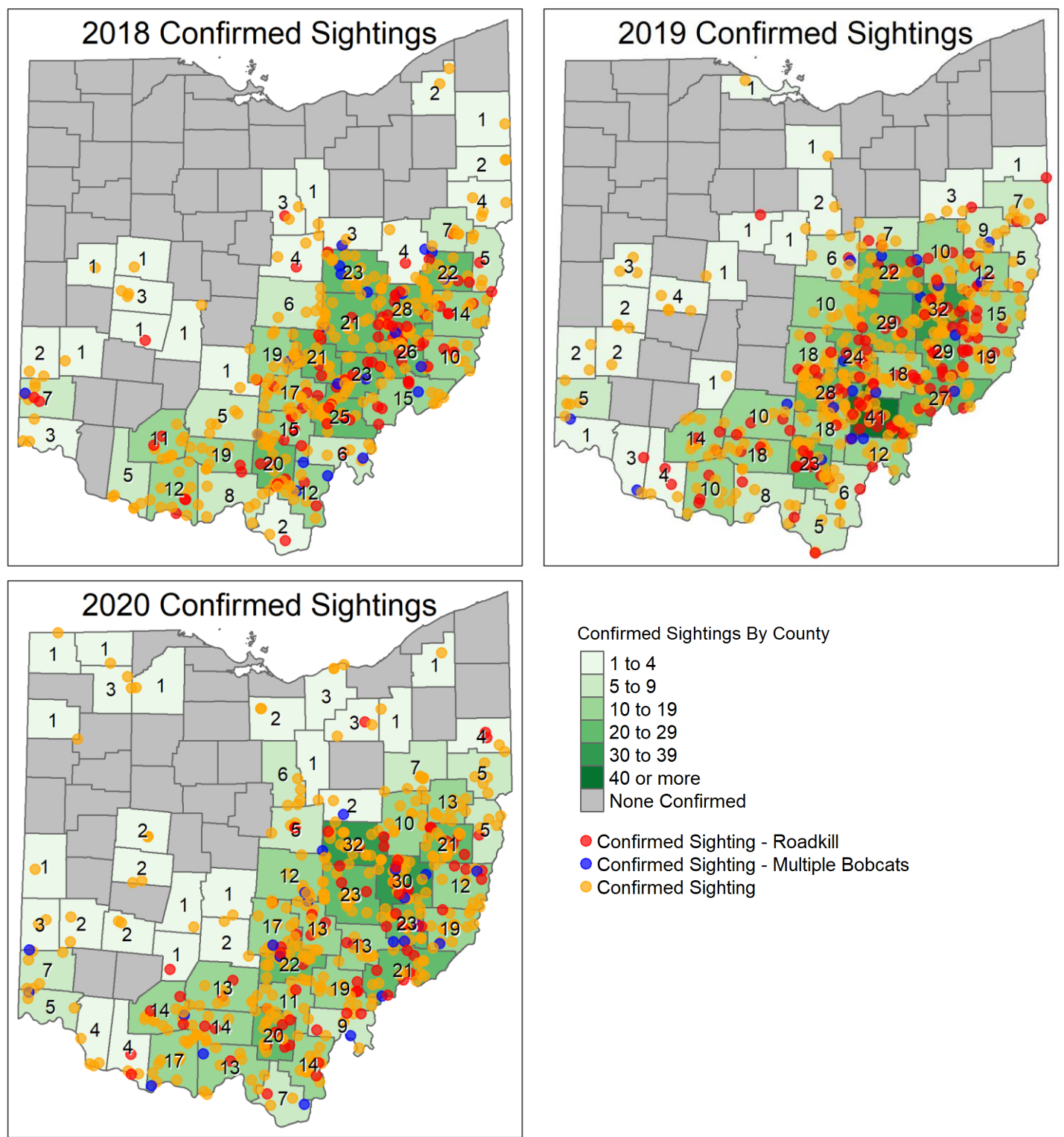


Figure 2. Confirmed bobcat sightings by county in Ohio in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

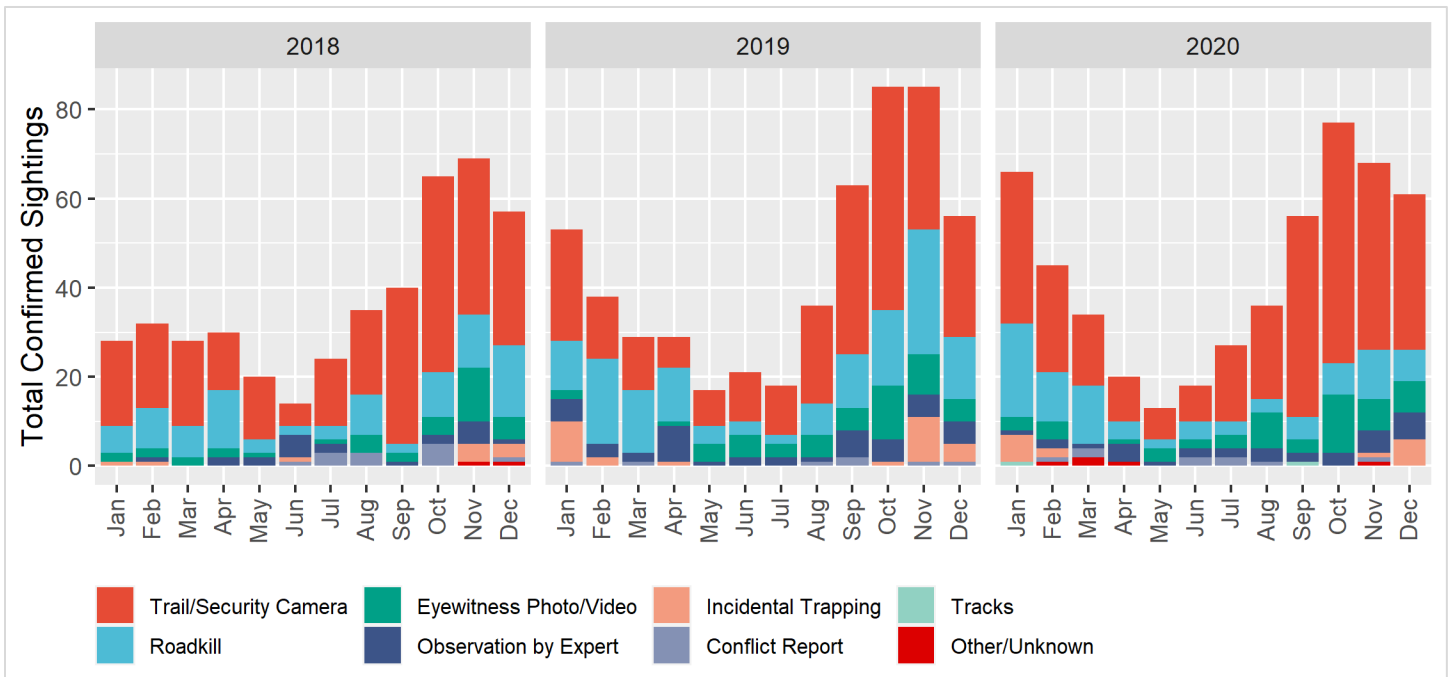


Figure 3. 2018-2020 confirmed bobcat sightings by month in Ohio.

Sightings were reported throughout the year but were most common from September through January (Figure 3). Increased bobcat activity coinciding with this time of year is likely the reason for the increased number of sightings. In the fall, young bobcats are beginning to disperse from their mother's home range to establish their own range, and January is the start of bobcat breeding season in Ohio. This time of year also corresponds with hunting and trapping seasons when people may be more likely to be in the field and encounter a bobcat, or have a trail camera set up, which may also account for some of the increase in sightings during this time.

Since 2008, trail cameras have been the primary source of confirmation for bobcat sightings, with anywhere from 33-69% of confirmed sightings coming from trail camera pictures. This continued to be the case in 2018, 2019, and 2020 (Table 1). The number of confirmed sightings from trail cameras in 2019 was lower than the previous two years, but increased again in 2020. Roadkill animals are the second most common source of confirmed sightings. The number of roadkill bobcats has steadily increased over the past several decades, however it should be noted that the high (in comparison to recent years) number of roadkill reported in 2019 may be due, in part, to a research effort conducted that year which collected roadkill carcasses for obtaining age and reproductive information. Other methods of confirmation such as

Table 1. Method of confirmation for confirmed bobcat sightings in Ohio in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

Confirmation Method	2018	2019	2020
Trail/Security Camera	267 (60.4%)	257 (48.5%)	313 (60.1%)
Roadkill	92 (20.8%)	143 (27.0%)	91 (17.5%)
Eyewitness Photo/Video	37 (8.4%)	51 (9.6%)	54 (10.4%)
Expert Observation	21 (4.8%)	45 (8.5%)	32 (6.1%)
Conflict Report	13 (2.9%)	7 (1.3%)	9 (1.7%)
Incidental Trapping	10 (2.3%)	27 (5.1%)	15 (2.9%)
Found Dead	2 (0.5%)	--	5 (1.0%)
Tracks	--	--	2 (0.4%)

evaluating evidence from conflict reports (primarily predation on poultry) are less common.

Overall, confirmed sightings have increased over the past decade (Figure 1). Several factors should be considered when assessing the increase in confirmed sightings. Despite the decrease in the number of trail camera sightings in 2019, in general, as trail cameras have become more prevalent over the past decade, we have seen an increasing trend in the proportion of confirmed sightings that come from trail cameras. It is likely that the growing popularity of trail cameras, as well as the decline in their cost has contributed to the increase in the number of trail camera photos of

bobcats. However, excluding sightings from trail cameras, the trend in confirmed sightings is still increasing, though the increase is less dramatic.

In 2017, the division launched a wildlife reporting website that made it easier for the public to report sightings. Sightings records are incomplete for 2016 because of staff turnover, however, at least some of the increase in sightings observed between 2016 and 2017 may be attributed to the availability of the reporting website. Conversely, as bobcat sightings become a more regular occurrence in some areas of the state, people may be less likely to report their sightings to the division.

For all of these reasons, changes in the number of sightings reported from year to year should be interpreted with caution.

Distribution of Sightings

Since 1970, 3,585 bobcat sightings have been confirmed in 77 counties (Figure 4). Genetic research conducted from 2002 to 2012 showed that the distribution of bobcats in Ohio was separated into two subpopulations, one in southeast Ohio (Noble County and surrounding areas) and one in southern Ohio (Jackson and Vinton counties and surrounding areas). Sightings are still most common in these regions, and recent research conducted at Ohio University, using samples

collected between 2018 and 2020, indicates that these subpopulations are no longer genetically distinct from one another. While sightings are less common in far southwest Ohio (Butler and Hamilton counties), females with kittens have been observed in these counties during the past several years, indicating that a small resident, reproducing population is present in this area as well.

As confirmed sightings have increased over the past decade, so have the number of townships and counties where sightings occur (Table 2). This suggests populations may be expanding from the core populations in southeast and southern Ohio into new areas. In 2018, confirmed sightings occurred in 243 townships in 46 counties, in 2019 confirmed sightings occurred in 284 townships in 48 counties, and in 2020 confirmed sightings occurred in 293 townships in 58 counties.

Ten adjacent counties in western Ohio (Shelby, Miami, Logan, Champaign, Clark, Greene, Marion, Union, Madison, and Fayette counties) all had their first confirmed modern-day bobcat sighting in the last four years. In addition, three adjacent counties in northwest Ohio (Fulton, Henry, and Wood counties) all documented their first confirmed sighting in 2020. These occasional sightings in west and northwest Ohio may be the result of

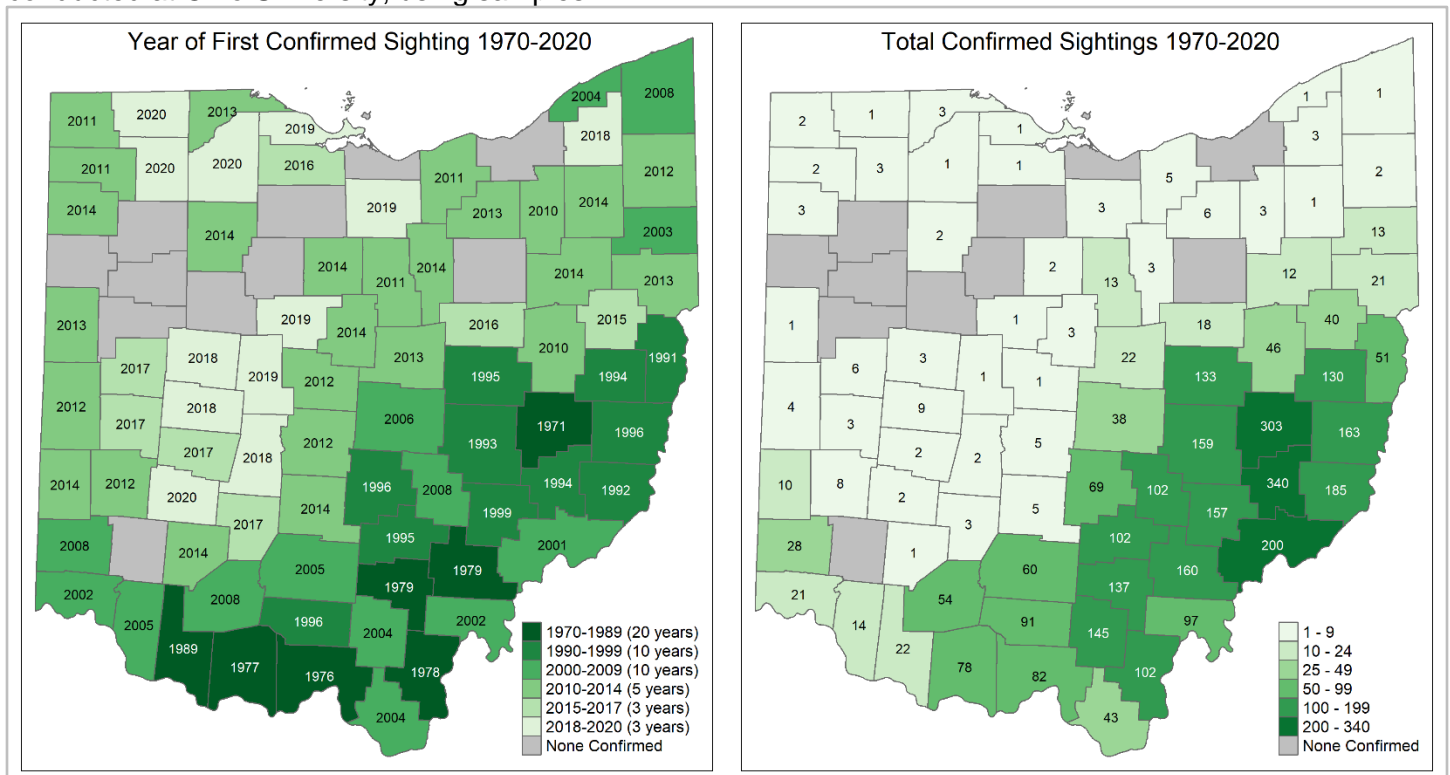


Figure 4. Year of first confirmed bobcat sighting and total confirmed sightings by county in Ohio from 1970 to 2020.

bobcats dispersing from the established population in southeast and southern Ohio, or from populations in Indiana, Kentucky, or Michigan. The number of confirmed sightings in these counties remains low, and we have not documented evidence of reproduction in these regions, so it remains to be seen if these areas will provide adequate habitat to support resident populations. However, these sightings highlight the potential for bobcat populations to expand, or at least disperse,

through areas beyond the forest-dominated portions of Ohio.

We thank the members of the public who reported bobcat sightings as well as Division of Wildlife personnel that reported sightings and collected road-killed bobcats. You can report sightings online at wildohio.gov (click on "Report Wildlife Sightings").

Table 2. Bobcat Sightings in Ohio from 1971 to 2020.

Year	Confirmed Sightings	Unconfirmed Sightings	Number of Counties with Confirmed Sightings*	Number of Townships with Confirmed Sightings*
1971	1	--	1	1
1975	--	3	--	--
1976	1	1	1	1
1977	2	3	1	2
1978	1	--	1	1
1979	2	--	2	0
1980	1	--	1	1
1987	--	1	--	--
1989	1	--	1	0
1990	1	--	1	1
1991	2	1	2	2
1992	1	10	1	1
1993	1	1	1	1
1994	3	1	2	2
1995	4	4	3	1
1996	4	8	4	4
1997	--	29	--	--
1998	1	32	1	1
1999	2	20	1	1
2000	--	35	--	--
2001	6	46	6	6
2002	13	35	10	8
2003	18	44	8	13
2004	10	60	10	10
2005	26	66	14	14
2006	35	29	16	29
2007	56	181	16	38
2008	70	221	23	49
2009	98	270	16	61
2010	117	307	22	80
2011	137	295	25	70
2012	184	244	32	117
2013	200	226	36	127
2014	197	176	39	131
2015	265	Not Available	35	119
2016	141	Not Available	32	79
2017	491	Not Available	46	259
2018	442	524	46	243
2019	530	461	48	284
2020	521	520	58	293

*Note: This information may be incomplete, as some confirmed sighting records do not include township and/or county information.