

## Bobcat Released Into the Wild

**A bobcat found injured and orphaned as a kitten returns to the remote canyon country of Utah.**

*By Stacy N. Hackett*

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Sophie the bobcat is released into the wild canyon country of Utah. Though they named her and cared for her, the wildlife rehabilitators at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary worked diligently to keep the young bobcat's wild instincts intact.

Licensed wildlife rehabilitator Carmen Smith and sub-permittee Barbara Weider wanted Sophie, the young bobcat, to return to the wild one day, with all her natural wiles and instincts unmarred by human contact.

This month, Sophie the bobcat did just that. With a leap out of her carrier into the canyon country of Utah, the young bobcat raced away from her temporary caregivers into a new life in the wild.

Sophie the bobcat came to Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, last summer, after a canyon guide found the 4-pound kitten dehydrated and malnourished at the bottom of a slot canyon in Utah's back country.

Smith and Weider immediately nursed the kitten back to health with intravenous feedings. When the kitten gained her strength, the wildlife rehabilitators placed her in a spacious run designed for large cats, monitored by remote cameras to permit staff to view the animals with less frequent human contact. As Smith would explain to sanctuary visitors, the less habituated the bobcat became to people, the better her chances would be of surviving once she returned to the wild.

Sophie's wild instincts remained intact, with a healthy dose of leering toward humans. Her hunting skills increased, leading Smith and Weider to hope for a spring release into the wild, when prey would be more plentiful. Earlier this year, it became apparent Sophie was ready to return to the wild. "We know she's incredibly fast," Weider said. "And she's got the stalking and pouncing activity down."

Utah wildlife officials approved Smith's choice of a release site: a large, spacious area with few natural or manmade obstacles to block the bobcat's roaming or prevent her from avoiding another cat's territory. When Smith placed the trap at the release site, Sophie growled but didn't panic. The moment Smith released the trap's door, the young bobcat raced toward the juniper forest and disappeared from sight.

"I was really quite please with how it went," Smith said. "She obviously was quite aware of what was happening and ran away, as she should. She's got lots of opportunities and options out there now."