

# STUDY QUESTIONS

## TO “HIDDEN TRACKS”

Study and learn facts and ideas based on this Young Naturalists nonfiction story in *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, May-June 2026, [www.mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine](http://www.mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine).

---

*Minnesota Conservation Volunteer* magazine is your guide to wild things. Every other month, six times a year, the magazine arrives in your school library. Each one has a story for Young Naturalists like you. **Are you curious about wild things?** Young Naturalists tells true stories that can answer all kinds of questions such as these—

**Have you ever heard of a purple wartyback?** How about a pink heelsplitter, pimple-back, or monkeyface? All are Minnesota freshwater mussels. Read Young Naturalists stories to learn which species (kinds) of critters live in Minnesota—frogs, salamanders, snakes, wild cats, wild dogs, weasels, mice, and rabbits.

Want to **peek inside the den of a red fox** and see how the kits grow up? Are you a rock hound searching for agates? Have you ever wondered what’s alive under snow? How animals see? Why is a bluebird blue? How birds fly?

Would you like to hear the true story of **giants of the ice age**? Young Naturalists also tells you about the underground universe. You can read the story of a tiny owl that went to a hospital with an injured wing. Find out about a boy who worked in a logging camp. Read the story of Ojibwe children today hunting and gathering like their ancestors did.

Learn how to get started **camping, snowshoeing, ice fishing, or canoeing**.

**Find these stories and more online** at [www.mndnr.gov/young\\_naturalists](http://www.mndnr.gov/young_naturalists).

*Your knowledge of wild things helps you explore and enjoy the outdoors. Have fun!*

# “HIDDEN TRACKS”

Study and learn facts and ideas based on this Young Naturalists nonfiction story in *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer*, May-June 2026, [www.mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine](http://www.mndnr.gov/mcvmagazine).



YOUNG NATURALISTS

BY Christine Petersen

## Hidden TRACKS

Canada lynx are among the most MYSTERIOUS residents of Minnesota's northern forests.

Minnesota north woods are true wilderness, with dense forests, boggy wetlands, and deep winter snows that have always made it hard for people to enter. But animals know the way, and this realm is full of life. Day and night, through summer's heat and winter's chill, wildlife follow hidden trails through thick stands of trees, around moss-covered boulders, over fallen logs, and across frozen creeks.

Visit the north woods and you might be lucky enough to see a moose, black bear, or porcupine. Perhaps you'll even catch the distant song of howling wolves. But there is another creature wandering these trails, one so rare that few people ever catch a glimpse of it: the Canada lynx.

True to their name, most of these graceful wildcats live in the remote forests of Canada or Alaska. Small populations are also found in several northern states—including Minnesota—and high in the mountains of some western states.

Until about 20 years ago, any lynx spotted in Minnesota were assumed to be visitors, not residents. Now, biologists are revealing a different story: Canada lynx are a small but important part of the wild community in our state.

The Canada lynx is a cat made for the north woods.

44 MINNESOTA CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER 45

## 1. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT A PLACE WHERE CANADA LYNX POPULATIONS ARE FOUND?

- a. mixed forests of northeastern Minnesota
- b. remote forests of Canada and Alaska
- c. deciduous forests throughout Minnesota
- d. high in the mountains of some western states

## 2. ACCORDING TO THE STORY AUTHOR, WHAT CHARACTERISTICS OF MINNESOTA'S NORTH WOODS MAKE IT MORE CHALLENGING FOR PEOPLE TO TRAVEL THROUGH?

- a. deep snow
- b. thick stands of trees
- c. boggy wetlands
- d. all of the above

## 3. TRUE OR FALSE? LYNX ARE CANDIDS AND HAVE MASSIVE JAW MUSCLES AND SHARP TEETH FOR EATING THEIR PREY?

## 4. WHICH CONTINENT DOES NOT HAVE FELIDS?

- a. Asia
- b. South America
- c. Antarctica
- d. Africa

**5. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DESCRIPTORS FROM THE STORY HELPS EXPLAIN WHY THE CANADA LYNX IS SUCH AN EFFECTIVE PREDATOR?**

- a. their stealth and speed
- b. their gracefulness
- c. their agility and clicking nails
- d. All of the above

**6. WHAT IS ONE DETAIL FROM THE STORY THAT SUPPORTS THE AUTHOR'S DESCRIPTION OF THE LYNX AS A POWERFUL PREDATOR?**

**7. BASED ON STORY DETAILS, WHICH CHARACTERISTIC WOULD BE LEAST HELPFUL IN IDENTIFYING LYNX FROM OTHER FELIDS IN THE NORTH WOODS, SUCH AS A BOBCAT?**

- A. their size
- b. their tail looks like it has been dipped in ink
- c. their behavior (they stay and stare at you rather than running away)
- d. their tracks have fur indents from their large furry paws

**8. ACCORDING TO THE STORY, WHAT IS THE NICKNAME FOR MINNESOTA'S NORTHEASTERN CORNER, WHICH STRETCHES FROM THE CANADIAN BORDER TO THE SHORELINE OF LAKE SUPERIOR?**

- a. up north
- b. north woods
- c. the understory
- d. Superior National Forest

**9. WHICH PART OF THE FOREST IS WHERE THE LYNX CALLS HOME?**

- a. the canopy
- b. the forest floor
- c. the understory
- d. none of the above

**10. MUCH OF THE LYNX'S LIFE IS TIED TO WHICH ANIMAL?**

- a. red squirrel
- b. grouse
- c. eastern cottontail
- d. snowshoe hare

### **CHALLENGE QUESTION:**

Is the story title, “Hidden Tracks,” an example of literal or nonliteral (figurative) language? What story details support your reasoning.

### **MINNESOTA COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENTS PRACTICE ITEMS**

**1. IF YOU WERE TRAVELING THROUGH THE NORTH WOODS OF MINNESOTA LAST YEAR AND YOU SAW A CANADA LYNX, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS MOST LIKELY TO BE TRUE?**

- a. it probably wasn't a lynx but more likely a bobcat or cougar
- b. it was a lynx that was passing through, but not a resident
- c. it could have been a lynx that lives in Minnesota or a visitor passing through
- d. it was a lynx that had escaped

**2. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD BE CONSIDERED A MAIN IDEA FROM THE STORY?**

- a. We don't know a lot about the Canada lynx because they are so secretive.
- b. Canada lynx are a small, but important and fascinating part of the wild community in Minnesota.
- c. Canada lynx are active for fewer than five hours a day.
- d. Researching the Canada lynx takes a lot of creativity.

**3. ON THE LAST PAGE OF THE STORY, IN THE SECTION “THE CYCLE CONTINUES,” THE AUTHOR’S WORD CHOICES GIVE US CLUES AS TO HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT THE POPULATION OF CANADA LYNX IN MINNESOTA. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CAN WE INFER FROM THESE WORD CHOICES?**

- a. The author feels anxious about the changing numbers of the lynx population.
- b. The author is surprised that the number of Canada lynx in Minnesota declines in years where there are fewer hares.
- c. The author appreciates the Canada lynx and feels encouraged by knowing that they live in Minnesota's north woods, even if we don't yet know for certain if their population will continue to grow.
- d. The author worries that the Canada lynx may go extinct soon.

#### **4. WHAT ARE MINNESOTA RESEARCHERS TRYING TO LEARN ABOUT THE CANADA LYNX?**

- a. their population (how many, where they are, and if they are breeding in Minnesota)
- b. their adaptations to the snowy north woods
- c. the sounds they make to communicate
- d. the reason why their tails evolved to be short, since most felids have long tails

#### **5. WHAT STORY DETAIL BEST SUPPORTS THE STATEMENT THAT LYNX ARE PERFECTLY SUITED FOR LIFE IN COLD, SNOWY PLACES?**

- a. They have large eyes that are highly sensitive to movement in low light or full sunshine.
- b. Lynx have long legs, raising their body above the snow.
- c. Canada lynx are among the most mysterious residents of Minnesota's northern forests.
- d. A female lynx doesn't need to find a cave or den but can use a fallen conifer tree for shelter.

#### **6. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS A SIMILE THAT STEMS FROM THE STORY?**

- a. The paws of the lynx are like snowshoes.
- b. The lynx's paws are snowshoes.
- c. The lynx has large furry feet that leave distinctive tracks in the snow.
- d. The paws of the lynx work similarly to snowshoes; they disperse weight to help the lynx walk on top of the snow rather than sink into the snow, just as a snowshoe helps spread out the weight of a person so that they don't sink into the snow when they walk.

#### **VOCABULARY**

Felid – a member of the cat family

Predator – an animal that hunts, catches, and eats other animals for food

Prey – the animal being hunted and eaten

Canid – a member of the dog family, such as foxes, wolves, dogs, coyotes

Massive – very large and solid

Conifer – a type of tree or shrub that produces cones and has needle-shaped leaves

Deciduous – a type of tree that loses all its leaves every fall and grows new ones in the spring

Understory – layer of plants, shrubs, and small trees growing in a forest beneath the main, tall canopy

Thicket - a small, thick patch of bushes, shrubs, or small trees growing close together

Teensy – very tiny