

NATURE RAMBLES WITH

A DEPARTMENT FOR THE YOUNG FOLKS

UNCLE
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BOBBY MEETS A BUNNY AND JUST TAKES A LOOK. HE HAS BEEN TAUGHT NOT TO KILL WHEN HE HAS SUCH A VISITOR BUT IF LEFT ALONE HE WILL BE A REAL BOBCAT AND MAKE A MEAL OF THE BUNNY

ARE WILDCATS WILD?

BY WILLIAM L. FINLEY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

DOWN the road rumbled a car. It whirled around the bend. I straightened up from my weeding. Swaying and balancing on the hood of the car was a bobcat. The driver jammed on the brakes. The cat jumped lightly off, and Hank McNee stepped out of the car.

"How did you get him so tame?" I asked.

"Well," he said as the big cat rubbed against his leg, "Bobby was taken out of a den in eastern Oregon when he was only a few hours old. He is a part of the family. In fact, he is the only child we have. I've lived and slept with him for four years."

"Slept with him?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, every night. You see, he was such a little

kitten in the beginning, and Mrs. McNee and I had to mother him. He was a bottle baby. We tried to keep him under the bed, but he wouldn't stay. He used to crawl in with us, and now he won't sleep anywhere else."

"A full grown bobcat is a strange bed-fellow," I suggested.

"Yes, but he is as gentle as a tame kitten. When Bobby was young, he didn't get raw meat because we thought it would make him savage. One evening he sneaked out and didn't appear at bed-time. Finally we went to bed and left the door open. Along toward morning, I felt something jump on the bed. There was Bobby with a big hen. He laid it on the pillow. I talked with him and



BOBBY WILL PLAY AND BOX WITH HANK, FIGHTING AND SNARLING BUT ALL THE TIME HE WILL KEEP HIS CLAWS SHEATHED AND WHEN THE BATTLE IS OVER WILL RUB HANK'S CHEEK AND KISS HIM

spanked him, but couldn't teach him to let chickens alone. It has cost me a good many dollars for neighbors' hens. However, I can hold a chicken or a rabbit within a few inches of his nose, and he has learned to obey and not touch it. One day he killed a dog. Since then I've kept a collar on his neck and led him around."

"But cats are naturally afraid of dogs," I said.

"Yes," answered McNee, "that's because man has always carried weapons and the dog has been his companion. If men had always had bobcats instead of dogs, the cats would have cleaned out the dogs. They are quicker in action and have fangs and claws that are more deadly.

"Once at an auto camp in Los Angeles, a stranger came up with a bulldog that sniffed around the car. I suggested he'd better call his dog.

"Says he, 'He won't hurt anything.'

"Says I, 'Well, there's a cat in there that might hurt him.'

"'Nonsense.' He wouldn't let the dog hurt the cat.

"Bobby was lying on the bed rolls. The dog,

with his feet on the running-board, was puzzled about cat smell. Then Bobby landed. There was just a blur of a cat and a scratched-bitten-clawed dog. Away went the bull, kicking gravel at every jump.

"We never have to worry about people stealing things out of the car. It would be too much like touching a match to a can of powder.

"The reason Bobby got to riding on the hood of the car was because we live out in the sage-brush where jack-rabbits are thick. He likes to ride where he can see. When a jack starts up the road or jumps for cover, Bobby likes nothing better than to pick him up in a flying leap."

I could see that this cat was a one-man animal. He ignored everyone except his master. No one seemed anxious to get near enough to disturb his dignity.

"No one else could take such liberties with him," I said, as McNee picked the big cat up in his arms.

"No, I guess not," he replied. "He's all for me, and he's got a streak of jealousy that's deeper than any pet I ever had. There's no use of my trying to keep any other pet. One day we were traveling and Bobby was hungry. I came to a

place where a man had some Belgian hares and I bought a young one for Bobby's dinner. It was so tame I took a fancy to it. We kept it in the car for nearly a month. Bobby didn't pay much attention to it at first. One day when I was away, the rabbit was in a little place under the luggage in the car. When I returned, Bobby had dug down and pulled him out through the crack. The bunny lay dead in the seat.

"Later I thought I would cure his jealousy by getting some animal like a wolf or coyote pup that would be quick enough to hold its own. A man gave me a young coyote, and I kept him around where the two could get acquainted. When I petted or played with the coyote, Bobby would growl. His leash, however, kept him at a safe distance. He bided his time until one day there was just slack enough in the chain for him to leap for the coyote before he could be jerked back. In the wink of an eye, he had sunk his fangs into it just behind an ear. Within three minutes, the pup breathed his last."

Then McNee began to box and wrestle with

Bobby. The cat snarled and growled like a demon. He slapped back, but his claws were sheathed. Suddenly, McNee put his face down, and the cat licked it and rubbed against his cheek. Then McNee hauled out a paper and unrolled a two-pound chunk of raw meat. He held it in his hand and the cat gnawed off a little at a time. He was careful not to bite fingers and was gentler than a house cat.

This wildcat or lynx is not the ancestor of Tabby, the household pet. The kitty that likes to take a nap in your lap comes from early Egyptian times. Being made a pet has brought a wide change in color and looks. But the gap is not wide between the house cat and the bobcat. A tame pussy will go back to the wild if not given care. Centuries as a pet do not matter. Man has always been the enemy of the bobcat. Yet in one generation, Hank McNee had taken a bobcat and, through gentleness and human companionship, the animal had developed into a trusted and reliable pet. Was this gen-



HANK PUTS ON A FUR HAT BUT IT IS A LIVE ONE AND WOULD BE LITTLE USE ON A COLD DAY

tle, trust-worthy wildcat wild?

That may be a hard question to answer. There is no rule by which to answer it. I have had many wild pets myself. They have ranged all the way from a California quail to a white coyote. The little quail lived all but two days of his long life with me. Our home was his home. Our family was his family. He never was kept in a cage but lived in the library and roamed in the garden. He never seemed to care about going back to the wild. He was surely the least wild of any of my many pets. Yet he was a wild bird from generations of wild birds. It may have been that

the call to the wild in him was not as strong as it is in most wild animals. It may be that he would have answered such a call had it been strong enough. Most wild animal pets will answer it. Most of them still have much wildness in their nature. It is not often that they are truly tamed to become domestic companions, but a real desire to know them will do much as it did with Bobby.

THE RAINBOW IS ROUND

BY FLORENCE H. MOORE

At the end of the rainbow,
So the story is told,
For those who may find it,
Is a big pot of gold.

But how can that be—
Does anyone know?
For the rainbow is round—
Yes, indeed, that is so.

It truly is round;
Now please do not laugh,
Although from the Earth,
It looks cut in half.

But flying high in the sky,
Air pilots have found
The lower half of the circle,
Which proves it is round.

PUZZLE: Find the pilot and his
mascot, the parrot.

