

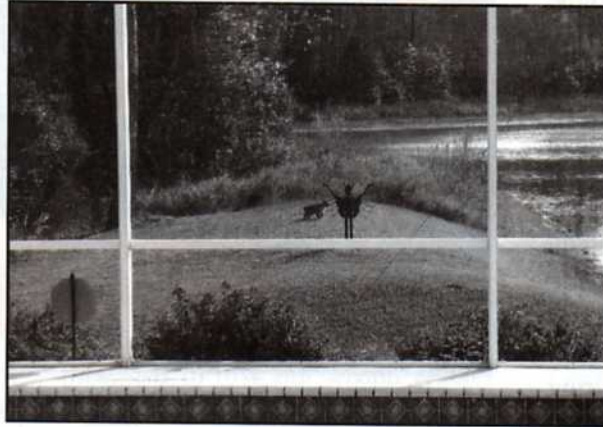
## Did I really see a Panther in my Gated Community?

We always talk about how developed Naples has become, but what is truly amazing is the wildlife that still exists in and among the rapid growth. For my readers that live in the Estates, you've probably had many wild encounters. When we moved to a house on a lake and preserve we had expected to see a lot of birds and snakes, but for the last few weeks, Michael & I have been asking ourselves, "WHAT ON EARTH WAS THAT...? THAT'S NOT OUR NEIGHBOR'S CAT...! THAT MUST BE A FLORIDA PANTHER!!! WHAT'S IT DOING IN OUR BACKYARD? Let's call the Naples Daily News. This is hot, crazy, exciting! We simply couldn't believe we were seeing an oversized mother cat and cub in our backyard just 1 mile north of Pine Ridge Road! We emailed the stunning pictures to the Conservancy to find out what was living in the woods behind our lanai.

What we didn't know and quickly found out from the Conservancy of SW FL was that the Florida panther is extremely rare with only an estimated 70-90 individuals left in the wild. The Florida panther is protected as an endangered species under State and Federal law. These cats, although potentially dangerous, are extremely rare and extremely shy. To see a panther should be considered a once-in-a-lifetime event for most people. We quickly gave up the idea of calling the Naples Daily News and accepted the Conservancy's suggestion that we probably have Bobcats (not the motorized

kind we are all used to) as neighbors. Apparently, the Conservancy often speaks to people who think they have seen a Florida panther. However, Florida panthers are rarely seen, and reported sightings typically are of a large animal dashing across a road at night.

Still, for those of you that do see a live bobcat in North Naples, consider yourself very lucky. Bobcats, Florida's other



native wild cat can weigh up to 35 lbs, usually have a spotted coat and the signature "bobbed" tail. Though the bobcat is not an endangered species, there is the potential for its local loss due to development. Bobcats are wide-ranging and solitary cats, with males and females defending territories that average 4800 and 2900 acres, respectively. The bobcat therefore requires extensive tracts of land, which

is increasingly difficult to find, certainly in our rapidly growing community. The bobcat is an excellent model for large-scale biodiversity and barometer of ecoregion health. Its presence suggests true wilderness in a landscape. That's what makes it so exciting to spot one even though it's "only" a bobcat and not a panther.

**Mara Muller** is a full time (and then some!) REALTOR with John R. Wood, Inc. She is an Accredited Buyer's Representative and a certified e-Pro. Please check out her website: [www.MaraSellsNaples.com](http://www.MaraSellsNaples.com) or call her at 659-6172 with your real estate questions.

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