



FURBEARERS OF CANADA



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This publication was
produced by the
Fur Institute of Canada,
in collaboration with the
Fur Council of Canada
and the
International Fur
Trade Federation.

Canada is blessed with an abundance of natural resources including forests, lakes and rivers, minerals, oil and gas, and many species of wildlife. This book will give you information on fifteen of Canada's most abundant and interesting furbearing animals.

From the beginning of time, humans have relied on animals for fur, leather, meat and other valuable products. Several hundred years ago, the search for furs drove the European exploration of North America; many of our cities began as fur-trading posts. Since the early 1900s, scientific research and government regulations have ensured that trapping (for fur, habitat protection or other purposes) is carefully controlled. Trappers take only part of the surplus that nature produces each year. Endangered species are never used. The fur trade is, in fact, an excellent example of the sustainable use of renewable resources, a principle promoted by conservation groups around the world.

The goal of trappers, government wildlife departments and conservation organizations across Canada is to keep wildlife populations stable and healthy. The greatest threat to furbearers and other wildlife is the loss of habitat as our cities grow and as more land is needed for agriculture, forestry, mining or other industrial activities. Despite these challenges, furbearer populations are healthy across North America. Some species (raccoon, fox and coyote) even share our towns and cities. The continued abundance of North American furbearers shows the care and commitment of trappers, conservation groups and government wildlife agencies.





Over 65,000 people are involved in the Canadian fur trade, including some 60,000 First Nations and non-native trappers. These people and their families rely on animals for both food and income. Above all, they respect nature and want the animals to be there for their children, their grandchildren and for many more generations to come.

Trapping occurs in all parts of Canada (and around the world) for many reasons: to protect natural habitat, farmland, roads and other property (for example, from muskrat burrowing or beaver flooding), for disease control (for example, rabies in raccoons and foxes), to protect endangered species from overly abundant predator populations, as well as for food and furs.

Trapping is highly regulated in Canada to ensure long-term conservation of furbearer populations. Canadian trappers also use methods that meet the highest animal welfare standards in the world. Our federal, provincial and territorial governments all support trapping as a responsible wildlife management tool and an important cultural and economic activity for First Nations and other people living in rural and remote regions across Canada.

We hope this booklet will help you to better understand and appreciate the Furbearers of Canada, while respecting the people who live closest to the land.

Rob Cahill
Executive Director
Fur Institute of Canada

Alan Herscovici
Executive Vice-President
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BEAVER

(*Castor canadensis*)

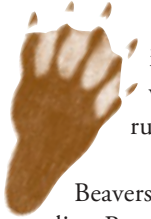
Rodent Family



NPS Photos



Two of the most familiar habitat changes produced by beavers are the cutting down of trees and the construction of the dam. The dam is constructed of sticks and branches that are dragged to the site, piled and interwoven, and sealed on the upstream side with mud and stones. The beaver cuts down an average of 216 trees a year. It can chop down trees up to about 40 cm in diameter. This activity is instinctive and will happen wherever beavers are motivated to build by the sound of running water.



Beavers mate for life and will take another mate only if the first dies. Beaver colonies contain from 2 to 12 members. A typical established colony has one breeding pair and a number of **yearlings*** and **kits**. They may leave the family colony by their first birthday, and may be gradually forced out by their parents, if they have not left by the age of 2.

Special features: The beaver's tail has important uses both in the water and on land. In the water, the animal can use its tail as a 4-way rudder. Although fat, the tail is flexible and muscular. When scared, beavers slap the water with their tails, making a noise like a pistol shot, warning all beavers in the vicinity that danger is near and maybe driving away potential predators.

Beavers **gnaw** on the bark of trees, which helps keep their teeth worn down. They also grind their teeth to sharpen them. Both of these routines are important since beaver's teeth are constantly growing.

Beavers have transparent eyelids that cover their eyes when they go under water. This helps them to see well and protects their eyeballs from abrasive particles suspended in the water. Their ears and noses have valves that close as they submerge, stopping water from entering. A flap closes behind their

incisor teeth to prevent water from going into their mouth when they chew sticks underwater.

Adults weigh between 18 and 22 kg and, including its 30-cm tail, a large beaver may measure 1.3 m long.

Both male and female beavers have two oil glands beneath the skin on their lower bellies. These glands produce oil, which beavers comb into their fur to waterproof it. They have a specialized split toenail on their hind feet, which aids in spreading this oil. They also have two castor glands which produce a scent that beavers deposit on scent mounds (mostly mud and vegetation) to mark territorial boundaries.

Food: Bark of trembling aspen tree (white poplar), willows, birch and black poplar, roots, pond lilies and other aquatic plants.

Denning: Beavers inhabit lodges or houses, which they construct from mud and sticks. These may be surrounded by water or located against the banks of lakes or streams. They have an unmuddied spot directly on top, which serves as an air vent. Beavers spend many months, as many as six, under the ice. As they cannot escape their lodge during the winter, they have adapted a survival strategy of storing food under the ice. Their activities are restricted to traveling under the ice between the house and the food pile. Lodges or houses also provide protection and keep the colony warm in winter.



Beavers may spend as long as 6 months under the ice.

Predators: The beaver's major predators are wolves. Bears will also occasionally prey.

*Words in bold are explained in the Glossary on page 31.

BEAVER

(*Castor canadensis*)
Rodent Family

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

20 months

Average life span:

4-5 years

Mating:

January/March

Young born:

May/June

Gestation:

103 to 107 days

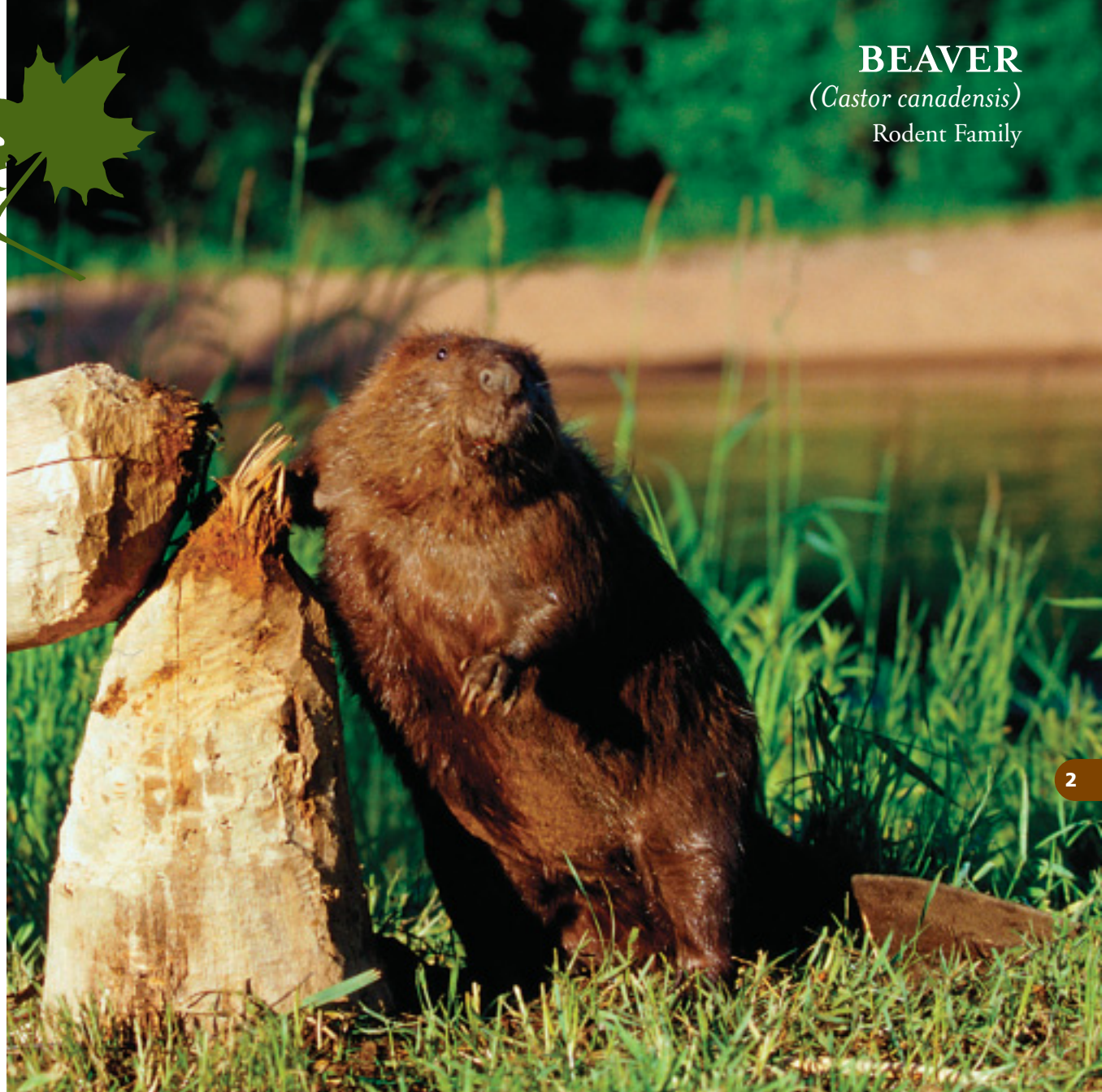
1 litter a year/Average 3 or 4 kits

Habitat:

Slow, winding streams and small lakes with soft banks where willows, aspen and other **deciduous** trees grow.

Management Issues:

Beaver dams can cause flooding on roads, railways, homes, and agricultural lands and often poses risk to humans. Overabundant populations result in increased risk of water-borne diseases such as *Giardia* (beaver-fever).



BLACK BEAR

(*Ursus americanus*)

Ursidae Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



Black bears inhabit all of their historical ranges in Canada, except heavily built-up cities, although they have adapted well to living near humans.

Black bears are solitary animals, except for the close bond between females and cubs, and the pairing that takes place during the mating season.



Bear cubs measure 15 to 20 cm long at birth and weigh about 0.2 to 0.3 kg which is only one two-hundredths of their mother's weight. Within 2 months, they increase their weight by 1,000 per cent on the rich milk supplied by their mother.

Normally, young bears remain with their mother until they are 16 to 17 months old. Females are usually full-grown by the age of 5, while males may continue to grow even after the age of 7.

Special features: The black bear is a bulky and thickset mammal. An adult black bear has a moderate-sized head with a rather straight facial profile and a tapered nose with long nostrils. Its lips, unlike those of other animals, are free from the gums, and the bear can use them with amazing dexterity. This adaptation and a long tongue greatly assist the bear when it feasts on tiny blueberries or even tinier ants. The ears are rounded and the eyes small. The tail is very short and not noticeable.

A black bear has feet that are well furred. Each foot has five curved claws, which the bear cannot hide. These are very strong and are used for digging and tearing out roots, stumps, and old logs when searching for food.

Owing to their compactness, bears often appear much heavier than they really are. Adult males weigh about 135 kg, although exceptionally large animals weighing over 290 kg have been recorded. Females are much smaller than males, averaging 70 kg.

Black bears are powerful swimmers and remarkably fast runners.

Bears are true hibernators, they do not have to eat or eliminate waste, but subsist entirely on their stored fat. During the winter they may lose up to 30 percent of their pre-denning weight. Most bears continue to lose weight during the early summer period until mid-July when quantities of berries start to become available.

Safety: If you see a bear on school property or near your home: Go inside right away. If the bear sees you: Don't approach the bear, SLOWLY BACK AWAY. REMOVE and drop your backpack if it contains food. If the bear moves toward you: SLOWLY BACK AWAY while MAKING NOISE. YELL at the bear to Go Away!, Do Not "play dead", Do Not turn and run. Help keep bears away: Do not feed bears; keep the schoolyard and the outside of your homes free of food and litter; fill bird feeders only through the winter months; Put garbage out on the morning of garbage day; Pick all ripe fruit off trees, and remove vegetables and fallen fruit from the ground.



NPS Photo

Help keep bears away! Keep yards clear of litter.

Food: Emerging grasses, sedges and weeds, ants and other insects like wasps and bees, leaves of trembling aspen, strawberries, serviceberries, pin cherries and blueberries.

Denning: The bases of fallen trees, beneath roots, under a tree stump or overturned log or in a hole in a hillside.

Predators: Predators include older bears and occasionally wolves and lynxes.

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories except Prince Edward Island and southern Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Maturity:

3 to 5 years

Average life span:

10 to 15 years

Mating:

Mid-June/mid-July

Young born:

Mid-January/early February

Gestation:

210 to 240 days

(actual gestation is just 47 days, due to delayed implantation)

1 litter every year/Average 2 to 3 cubs

Habitat:

Heavily forested areas, dense bush and wooded mountains.

Management Issues:

Black bears have adapted very well to a human altered landscape. Because of this, they are often found living within towns and suburban areas.

BLACK BEAR

(*Ursus americanus*)

Ursidae Family/Carnivore



BOBCAT

(*Lynx rufus*)

Cat Family/Carnivore



Bobcats are not found as far north as lynx because they don't have the large, snowshoe-like footpads, which give the lynx mobility on snowy ground. Towards the south, where there isn't as much snow, the bobcat outcompetes and displaces the lynx.



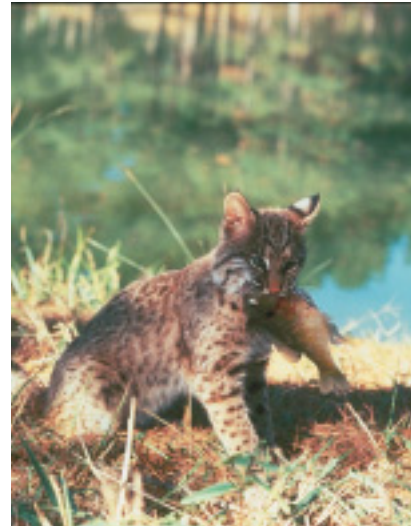
Mates form no lifelong union, but the male may be put up with and allowed to assist in providing food at the end of the nursing period. The newborns have **mottled** coats with subdued spots, and have quite strong facial markings. They open their eyes within 3 to 9 days, and are **weaned** at 2 months of age. The female is protective of her young, but may leave them, if humans disturb the den.

Special features: Bobcats are bigger than a house cat and a little smaller than a lynx. Even though they resemble the lynx, they have several features, which distinguish them from that species. Their legs are shorter and their feet smaller and less hairy. Their ear tufts are shorter, and their tails lack the full black tip like that of the lynx.

Bobcats have a good sense of smell, but rely on their sharp eyesight and hearing for hunting and survival. They prefer established hunting routes, but will wander away to follow prey. They may creep along steadily from cover to cover until close enough to pounce, lie motionless in a tree, watching and listening for unwary prey passing beneath, or crouch in ambush on a trail.

Bobcats are solitary and shy, and sneak silently away at the first sign of danger. They will climb trees to escape from hounds, to chase prey or to take a rest.

Food: Hares, rabbits, squirrels, mice, porcupines, mink, skunks, muskrats, moles, **shrews**, chipmunks, birds and their eggs, snakes, fish, **crustaceans** and insects. In agricultural areas, bobcats sometimes prey on chickens, pigs, sheep and calves. In deep snow, they can pull down and kill a weakened deer.



Bobcats hunt in various habitats. They catch fish, and will even pull down and kill weakened deer in deep snow.

Denning: Dens are usually made under vine-covered logs, in root depressions, under fallen trees and brush piles or in small, natural rocky caves, crevices or recesses. Moss and dried leaves are sometimes brought to the shelters.

Predators: Cougars and coyotes. Kittens are preyed upon by foxes and adult male bobcats, large owls and hawks.

Distribution:

Southern Canada

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

10 to 12 years

Mating:

February through April

Young born:

March to May

Gestation:

50 to 70 days

1 litter a year/Average 2 to 3 kits

Habitat:

Thinly treed areas, rocky hillsides and dry valleys. Has adapted to agricultural and populated areas.

Management Issues:

In agricultural areas, bobcats sometimes prey on chickens, pigs, sheep and calves.

BOBCAT

(*Lynx rufus*)

Cat Family/Carnivore



COYOTE

(*Canis latrans*)

Canid Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



Newborn coyotes are blind, and have sooty brown, woolly coats and dark ears, backs and tails. At 3 or 4 weeks, the young are able to leave the den. Whether or not the den is disturbed, the parents may move the pups from site to site, always choosing areas with water, shade, activity space for the pups, good visibility and nearby escape cover. Family groups remain intact throughout the fall, or until the young disperse.



Coyotes inhabit the aspen parkland and short- and mixed-grass prairie in the three prairie provinces, preferring open or semi-wooded habitats. At the turn of the twentieth century, coyotes began a dramatic range expansion that is still in progress. They have spread north into the boreal forest, west into the mountains, and east into Ontario, Quebec, and the Atlantic provinces.

Special features: The coyote is about the size of a small collie, but has a narrower snout and nose.

Coyotes are sometimes mistaken for wolves as adults, and for foxes as infants. Adult coyotes usually run with their tails pointed downward. This helps to distinguish them from wolves, which run with their tails straight out. Coyote pups can be distinguished from fox pups by their tails, which lack the white tip characteristic of newborn foxes, and by their eyes. Unlike the eyes of young foxes, which are blue and have slit-like pupils, the eyes of young coyotes are yellow with round pupils.

Coyotes usually travel at a trot. They can cover short distances at speeds of 40 to 50 km/h. When chased, they increase their speed by at least 10 km/h. They are strong swimmers, and never hesitate to wade into the water in pursuit of waterfowl.

Although the coyote usually hunts alone or with a mate, more than two animals may unite to capture larger prey. In late summer and early fall, families hunt as a group. When tracking smaller animals, the coyote behaves much like the fox, tracing the prey, standing motionless on spotting it, and then pouncing.



NPS Photo

Coyotes can run up to 60 km an hour for short distances, which is faster than a wolf.

Food: Mice, rabbits, ground squirrels, groundhogs, hares, birds, **carcass** and deer.

Denning: Dens are found in concealed spots on brush-covered slopes, steep banks and rocky ledges, as well as under stumps, dry **culverts** and empty buildings. Like the fox, coyotes prefer to renovate the abandoned dens of other species, such as groundhog and skunk.

Predators: Wolves, cougars, bears and golden eagles.

COYOTE

(*Canis latrans*)

Canid Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

1 to 2 years

Average life span:

4 to 8 years

Mating:

February/April

Young born:

April/May

Gestation:

60 to 66 days

1 litter a year/Average 5 to 6 pups

Habitat:

Coyote habitat includes the marginal farmlands, highly developed mixed farming areas, swamplands, game preserves, parks, and the edges of cities and towns. They can do well wherever there are forest edges.

Management Issues:

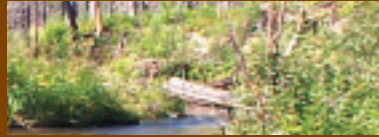
Coyotes are wily predators that often prey on livestock (cattle and sheep) and domestic pets.



FISHER

(*Martes pennanti*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



The blind and helpless newborn fishers are partly covered with fine hair. They cry like domestic kittens. Their eyes usually open by the 53rd day. The kits nurse for about 4 months and begin to eat meat before they are **weaned**. At 7 to 8 months, they are nearly full grown and are beginning to leave the home range of their birth.



Special features: Fishers are well known for preying on porcupines, which they kill by attacking their face and head again and again. Little of the dead porcupine is wasted. The fishers eat everything except the skin, the large bones, the feet and the intestines.

Fishers have the ability to walk or run down a tree. Their hind feet can be turned so the claws will allow this. This is similar to squirrels. Fishers have short, heavy legs, sharp claws and a long, bushy, tapering tail. They use 2 types of scent glands to mark their territory: a pair of anal glands, and a set of small glands on the pads of the back paws.

The adult male usually weighs from 3.6 to 5.4 kg and measures 90 to 120 cm from the nose to the tip of the tail. The adult female weighs from 2 to 2.5 kg and has a total length of 75 to 95 cm.

The fisher's large feet let it walk on top of the snow. There are pads on each of the five toes and the middle portion of each foot. In winter, the heavy fur that protects the feet almost hides these pads.

As with most of the other members of the weasel family, adult fishers remain alone for most of the year.

Food: Snowshoe hares, **shrews**, squirrels, mice, birds, porcupines, **carcass**, birds' eggs, insects, reptiles, **amphibians** and various fruits and nuts.

Denning: Hollow trees and logs, holes in rocky ledges, old porcupine dens and cavities in the snow are likely den sites.

Predators: Cougars, lynxes, bobcats, wolverines, coyotes, other fishers, and golden eagles.



Fishers are well known for preying on porcupines.



Cougars are one of the fisher's predators.

FISHER

(*Martes pennanti*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories except P.E.I. and Newfoundland. Rare in N.W.T., Nunavut, Yukon and Northern B.C.

Maturity:

5 to 6 months

Average life span:

4 to 5 years

Mating:

End of March/April

Young born:

March/April

Gestation:

327 to 358 days (active pregnancy 8 weeks) 1 litter a year/Average 3 kits

Habitat:

Fishers are adaptable animals that will live in a variety of forested areas as long as there is something to eat. They avoid open areas and prefer dense forests.

Management Issues:

Fishers are aggressive hunters. They outcompete their smaller weasel cousins for available food supply. When there are a large number of fishers and their food sources become scarce, they can prey on domestic cats and small dogs.



LYNX

(*Lynx canadensis*)

Cat Family/Carnivore



After breeding, the male lynx does not remain with the female. However, when the kittens are born 60 days later, he may return to help provide food.

The newborn are completely furred and are blind for the first 10 days of life. They are **weaned** at 2 months of age, and begin to explore the world outside the den. The family stays near the den until the end of the first 3 months, by which time the female has begun to teach the young to capture mice. Later, when their hunting skills improve, they will prey on snowshoe hares. By fall, the young are ready to fend for themselves.

Special features: Lynxes are lean and sturdy. They have long, muscular legs and large furry feet with toes that spread to give them extra mobility on snow. Their black-tipped tail is very short and blunt, and their tufted ears are long and triangular.

Although the lynx and bobcat are about equal in weight, the lynx stands taller at the shoulder, measuring approximately 61.0 cm. Longer ear tufts, larger footpads and a tail with a full black tip also helps to distinguish a lynx from a bobcat. The average weight of an adult is 7.7 kg, and may range from 5.0 to 15.9 kg.

Lynxes are powerful fighters and good swimmers, traveling high in the water. They are curious and may follow a man for hours, but are not known to attack.

The lynx's main food is the snowshoe hare. It's estimated that one lynx can eat about 170 hares per year. When the hare population crashes in an area, many

lynxes die of starvation. They will travel over 500 miles in search of better hunting grounds.



Each lynx can eat up to 170 snowshoe hares in one year. Their survival depends on a good supply for hunting.

Food: Snowshoe hare, **grouses**, **ptarmigans**, waterfowl, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, mice, skunks, porcupines, eggs and fish.

Denning: Dens are made in hollow trees, tangled **thickets**, or holes in rocks, as well as under logs, stumps and fallen timber.

Predators: Wolverines, other lynxes, cougars, wolves and coyotes.

LYNX

(*Lynx canadensis*)

Cat Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

5 to 7 years

Mating:

Mid-March/Early April

Young born:

May/June

Gestation:

56 to 63 days

1 litter a year/Average 4 kits

Habitat:

A creature of the northland, the lynx prefers brush or woodlands and unbroken boreal forests far from human habitation. It rarely goes into open countryside.

Management Issues:

The main food of lynx is the snowshoe hare. When the hare population crashes in an area, many lynxes die of starvation. They will travel over 500 miles in search of better hunting grounds.



MARTEN

(*Martes americana*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



A marten is not born until 220 to 276 days after fertilization, and, for most of that time, the egg is in a resting state. This is known as “delayed implantation”. The active pregnancy lasts only 27 days. The newborns are blind for the first 4 to 6 weeks and are covered with fine, soft, yellowish hairs.



Special features: Martens are about half the size of a house cat, but with shorter legs, long slender bodies, small heads with a short, pointed muzzle, large rounded ears and dark brown eyes. Their paws have large, furred pads and semi-retractable claws. Their bushy tails are about 1/3 of their overall body

length. Males have an average length of 50 to 63 cm including the tail, and an average weight of 680 to 900 g. Females average 46 to 56 cm in total length and 450 to 680 g in weight.

Both sexes have 2 types of scent glands: the anal gland, located under the tail, and the abdominal gland, found under the skin of the belly. Particularly during the breeding season, marten will drag their bellies over logs and clumps of vegetation to mark their territory.

Martens have good senses of smell, sight and hearing. They are full of curiosity, and, because of this, they are easily baited and trapped. Males tend to be more active during the evening, while females are more active during the day. Except during the breeding season, martens live and travel alone. They may hide out during storms or very cold temperatures.

Martens are thorough when looking for prey, searching out brush piles and stumps and inspecting every hole and crevice. They can climb trees with

ease, but usually hunt and travel on the ground. Although they have been seen swimming even underwater, they hardly ever leave dry land. In winter, they sometimes tunnel along under the snow as they look for their prey.

Food: Red-backed voles, field mice, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, birds, insects, **carrion** and various fruits.

Denning: Den sites include hollow trees, under logs, stumps and rock crevices, as well as squirrel nests.

Predators: Large owls, hawks, fishers, lynxes, bobcats, coyotes, wolves and other martens.



Martens can climb trees with ease, but usually hunt on the ground.

MARTEN

(*Martes americana*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories
except P.E.I.

Maturity:

15 months

Average life span:

5 years

Mating:

July/August

Young born:

March/April

Gestation:

220 to 275 days (active pregnancy 27
days) 1 litter a year/Average 3 young

Habitat:

Mature coniferous or mixed wood
forest with coarse woody debris on the
forest floor. The cutting of large areas
of mature conifer forests destroyed
much marten habitat.

Management Issues:

The marten is a species that is sensitive
to timber harvesting of mature forest
habitat.



MINK

(*Mustela vison*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



Mink **kits** are born in natal dens lined with grass, leaves, fur or feathers. They are naked except for short, fine, white hairs. Their eyes open after about 25 days, and **weaning** occurs within 5 or 6 weeks. By 8 weeks, the **kits** have begun to catch their own prey. They grow quickly, the females reaching their adult weight at 4 months and the males, at 7 to 10 months. The young stay within the family territory until late August. Many will die before the end of their first year. Those who survive may live from 3 to 6 years.

Special features: Minks have short legs, long, weasel-like necks and trunks, and small, sharply pointed faces with small ears. Minks are **semi-aquatic** mammals; they have dense, oily underfur for protection in the water, and stiff hairs between their hind toes to help in swimming.

Males are larger than females. Overall lengths of males are 45.7 to 76.2 cm long. The male weighs 0.6 to 1.3 kg, and the female, 0.5 to 1 kg.

Other features include their defensive musk glands which give off an odour more unpleasant to most people at close range than that of the skunk.

Minks are active throughout the year. In inland areas where water freezes over and snow accumulates, they usually travel and hunt beneath the ice and in tunnels under the snow and may leave little sign of their presence during most of the winter. They are very efficient hunters, and often kill more than what they need. They regularly **cache** surplus items, a habit that is no doubt useful in some seasons, but which results in spoilage and waste in others.

More importantly, returning again and again to specific locations where prey may be concentrated, minks can have a large impact on a prey population in a relatively short time.

Food: Muskrats, mice, fish, frogs, crayfish, insects such as water beetles and various waterfowl and shorebirds.



Mink inhabit areas with plenty of water supply.

Denning: Muskrat and beaver bank **burrows** and lodges, cavities under trees, rock and brush piles.

Predators: Bobcats, lynxes, coyotes, foxes, wolves, fishers, river otters, eagles and the larger hawks and owls.

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

10 to 12 months

Average life span:

3 to 6 years

Mating:

February/March

Young born:

April/May

Gestation:

51 days

1 litter a year/Average 4 to 5 kits

Habitat:

Areas with plenty of water supply, e.g., marshes or slow streams with good cover along edges, lakes and large rivers.

Management Issues:

Minks are sensitive to environmental pollutants, especially of waters and streams.

MINK

(*Mustela vison*)

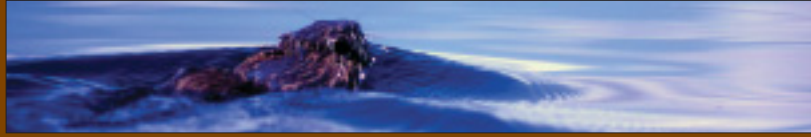
Weasel Family/Carnivore



MUSKRAT

(*Ondatra zibethicus*)

Rodent Family



NPS Photo



Musk rats live in breeding pairs, defending their home range territory against other adults, especially during breeding season. Fighting among muskrats is common, especially when populations are high, and appears to be most common around spring break-up, when juveniles and displaced animals are going away and adults are attempting to re-establish territories, and possibly in connection with mating activity.



Muskrat kits are blind, naked and helpless at birth, but they grow and develop quickly. Their eyes open and they are fully furred, active and swimming at 2 weeks. They are weaned and largely independent by 4 weeks, and near full size by about 3.5 months. Although the adult males may stay in the den where the young are born and raised, they do not take care of them.

Special features: Musk rats look like large rats or voles that have adapted to water conditions. They have several specialized features fitting them for their life in and around the water. A vertically flattened tail works like a paddle to push the rat in the water. Valves resembling flaps of skin close off the nostrils, ears and mouth for underwater feeding and traveling. Although not webbed like those of the beaver or otter, each hind foot has an edge of special hairs which makes swimming easier.

Because they can conserve oxygen by limiting blood flow to essential organs, muskrats can stay under water for up to 17 minutes but will normally remain submerged for 2-3 minutes.

The average adult weighs 1 kg and measures about 50 cm from nose to tail. Four pointed teeth, two on each jaw, are about 2 cm long and are used for snipping off plants. Like those of the beaver, they always grow and are worn down by chewing.

Food: Water plants, parts of cattail and bulrush roots, stalks, crayfish and clams.

Denning: Musk rats construct two kinds of houses, the dwelling house and the feeding house. These are made of dead or green cattail, bulrushes and underwater plants piled up on an object like a log, stump or root heap until they reach the height they want. Chambers are then hollowed out above the water line. Feeding houses are smaller and contain only one chamber.

In winter, a small, house-like structure called a “push-up” is made along cracks or small openings in the ice. Built of muck and bottom vegetation, which is piled up on the ice and hollowed out to form a chamber, push-ups are used for feeding and to give the muskrat air. Musk rats are active throughout the year. They are vulnerable to cold and wind and spend more time in their houses during the winter.

Predators: Minks, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, bobcats, otters, owls and hawks. Musk rats also kill each other.



NPS Photo

Musk rats can stay underwater for up to 17 minutes at a time.

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

2 to 3 years

Mating:

April and September

Young born:

May and October

Gestation:

28 to 30 days

2 to 3 litters a year, less in the north

Average 6 kits

Habitat:

Marshes, slow moving streams,
ditches, ponds and lakes.

Management Issues:

High reproductive rates have an impact on their environment. High population density can result in water contamination with parasites such as Giardia.

MUSKRAT

(*Ondatra zibethicus*)
Rodent Family



RACCOON

(*Procyon lotor*)

Procyonidae Family



Raccoons usually live in hollow trees and logs, caves, barns and other farm outbuildings, **culverts**, drainpipes or the **burrows** of other animals.



The newborns are furry everywhere except on the tail. Born blind, they are able to climb trees with their mother to escape danger even before they can see. Their eyes open at 3 weeks and, at 6 weeks, they are ready to leave the nest and explore. By 2 months of age, the young are able to look for food with their mother. The family remains together on the mother's home range throughout the winter. By early spring and just before a new litter is born, the young are ready to set off on their own.

Special features: Raccoons are famous for their bushy tail with 4 to 6 black rings, their sparkling black eyes and masked faces that give them the look of bandits. They have 5 toes on both the front and hind feet. Their long, dexterous fingers enable them to open latches, untie knots, turn doorknobs, and open jars. Their prints look like tiny human baby handprints and footprints.

Raccoons are an excellent example of the adaptation process, which fits an animal for its environment. The raccoons' keen vision equips them both for daylight activities and for night-time wanderings. Their hearing is acute, and their muzzle, digits and claws have a well-developed sense of touch. Their dark coat acts as camouflage at night. Raccoons are mainly active at night. They are good climbers and can swim if necessary.

Male raccoons are larger than the females with average body measurements from 73 to 95 cm, and their tails add another 22 to 25 cm to their length. Males typically weigh 8.6 kg and females, 7.5 kg.

More social by nature than fishers or martens, raccoons hunt and den as family units until the young leave home. During cold weather, raccoons will sleep for several days, but do not hibernate.



Young raccoons remain with their mother throughout the winter.

Starvation is one cause of death, particularly during a long winter. The young are most susceptible to starvation, principally because they have fewer body reserves than adults do. Raccoons of all ages lose half of their weight over the winter months.

Food: Young birds, birds' eggs, small mammals, **carrion**, poultry, fish, frogs, shellfish, insects, fruits, nuts, berries and corn. They also eat garbage in urban areas.

Denning: Three den types are used: refuge dens, brood dens and over-wintering dens. Elm, maple, oak and sycamore are good den trees. Lined with leaves or wood chips, the den is usually more than 3 m above the ground. The entrance is from 18 to 43 cm in diameter and always faces away from prevailing winds.

Predators: Mountain lions, bobcats, gray wolves, red foxes, coyotes, fishers, and owls; however, most of the raccoon's natural predators are no longer found in their range.

RACCOON

(*Procyon lotor*)

Procyonidae Family

Distribution:

Southern Canada except
Newfoundland and
Cape Breton Island

Maturity:

12 months

Average life span:

3 years

Mating:

January/March

Young born:

Mid-April/mid-May

Gestation:

63 days

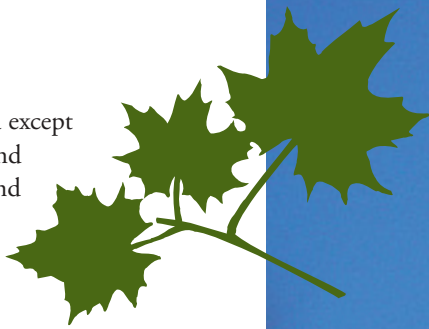
1 litter a year/Average 4 to 5 kits

Habitat:

Forested areas near water, river valleys,
on farm land and in urban localities.

Management Issues:

Raccoons are the primary host of
the raccoon strain of rabies; therefore,
there is concern regarding contact
with humans or domestic pets.
Raccoons have adapted well to
human environment and cause noise
and messes when they have access
to garbage.



RED FOX

(*Vulpes vulpes*)

Canid Family/Carnivore



Newborn red foxes are blind and deaf. All pups have the characteristic white-tipped tail. They are **weaned** at 2 months, and this allows the **vixen** to join her mate in the hunt for food. If the family den is disturbed, the **vixen** is likely to move her pups to another site or to split them up among several dens. Gradually, the pups begin to accompany their parents on hunting trips, and use the den less and less often.



Fall dispersal begins with short trips from home, which gradually lengthen into journeys of 2 or 3 days. Eventually, most of the young leave for good to find new home ranges.

Usually, red foxes maintain solitary dens, except during the breeding season and while rearing the young. Although the male may visit the home ranges of other females, a pair bonds for life and the female always remains within the male's home range. The male and female appear able to keep track of each other through signs like scent and vocal communication, which consists of yaps, whines and high-pitched howls.

Special features: About the size of a miniature collie dog, the red fox has a slim build, a deep chest and a thin waist. The fox's cheeks sport a slight **ruff**, which emphasizes the long, pointed snout, black nose and large, pointed ears. Its distinctive eyes have vertical, slit-like pupils that can take in a maximum of light at night. Its hearing is sharp and its sense of smell, keen. Its bushy tail insulates the nose and footpads against winter cold when the fox curls up to sleep.

The long, silky coat is burnished orange or golden yellow, with a darker shade of rusty brown along the back. The chin, muzzle tip, throat and belly are

creamy white. The ears are white inside and black outside. The legs and paws are black. The tail has a white tip, which helps to distinguish this species from the grey fox, whose tail is black tipped.

Food: Mice, muskrats, groundhogs, cottontail rabbits, and European and snowshoe hares, fruits, frozen fruit in late winter and early spring, insects, eggs and birds.

Denning: Digs to make or enlarge holes for rearing young. Prefers brush-covered slopes with sandy soil. Avoids coyote habitat.

Predators: Coyotes, bobcats, lynxes and golden eagles.



The red fox has slit-like pupils that can take in a maximum of light at night.



There are usually 2 or 3 kits in a red fox litter, born in early spring.

Distribution:

Southern Canada

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

10 to 12 years

Mating:

February thru April

Young born:

March to May

Gestation:

50 to 70 days

1 litter a year/Average 2 to 3 kits

Habitat:

Thinly treed areas, rocky hillsides and dry valley. Has adapted to agricultural and populated areas.

Management Issues:

A carrier of rabies as well as mange. Its ability to travel long distances contributes to the spread of disease.

RED FOX

(Vulpes vulpes)

Canid Family/Carnivore



RIVER OTTER

(*Lontra canadensis*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



Intelligent, shy and docile, otters are also quite social. They do not fight among themselves, except during the mating season, when males may tangle. They are accomplished swimmers and very playful, enjoying a slide down a bank into the water. Otters can remain submerged for up to 4 minutes. On land, they range widely, travelling considerable distances up and down riverbanks.



Adult male otters are usually solitary, but have been observed in small “bachelor groups” of up to 7 animals, particularly during the open-water season. The most stable otter groups are those consisting of an adult female with her dependent young.

The newborns are blind and toothless, and have black, silky coats. Their eyes open at 25 to 28 days and, at 3 months, the pups venture outside the den. They are **weaned** at 4 months, and the family remains together for about 8 months or until a new litter is born.

Special features: The otter has a sleek body with a thick layer of fat beneath the skin. River otters are from 0.9 to 1.3 m long and weigh about 20 to 37 kg.

The otter’s flat, round head is set on a wide neck, and features a short muzzle with large, sensitive whiskers and a flat, prominent nose. The protruding eyes provide excellent underwater vision.

Other adaptations, which fit the otter for its **semi-aquatic** lifestyle, include short legs with large webbed feet, and muscles that close off the ears and nostrils when the otter is underwater. The hind feet provide the main force in the water. The muscular, flexible tail is thick at the base and narrows towards the tip.

Otters maintain what are known as “pulling-out places”, or toilets, on banks. In one section, the otters urinate and deposit excrement while in another section they groom their fur by rolling and rubbing in piles of debris and twisted grass. The musky smell on these rub and roll piles suggests that the otters deposit oil from their anal glands to waterproof their fur.



Although otters are mainly active at night, they can sometimes be seen during the day.

Food: Fish, crayfish, birds, muskrats, frogs, turtles, snakes, waterfowl and fruits.

Denning: Otters live close to water, and prefer lakes, marshes and streams. They never construct houses, but den in abandoned beaver lodges, cavities under trees or burrows made by other animals. Dry vegetation, such as sticks, leaves and grass, is used to line the dens.

Predators: Wolves, coyotes, bobcats and cougars. Pollution is an important cause of mortality, due to otter reliance on fish and build up of toxins therein.

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

2 years

Average life span:

10 to 20 years

Mating:

March/April

Young born:

March/April

Gestation:

288 to 375 days

(active gestation 60-63 days)

1 litter a year/Average 2 to 3 pups

Habitat:

Beaver ponds, lakes, rivers, streams,
marshes and coastal **estuaries**.

Management Issues:

Otters are sensitive to environmental
pollutants, especially of waters and
streams.

RIVER OTTER

(*Lontra canadensis*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



WEASELS

(*Mustela erminea*) (*Mustela frenata*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



Weasels are born blind, flesh-coloured, and naked except for short, fine, white hairs on the neck. **Weaning** happens by 6 or 7 weeks, and at that time the male parent begins to bring food to the underground nest.

At 7 or 8 weeks, the young are old enough to hunt. They stay with the family unit until late summer. Female weasels are very tiny compared to males and this size allows pregnant females, heavy with unborn young, to enter and hunt mouse **burrows** with no trouble.

Special features: Weasels have sharp, fairly large teeth, small eyes and small rounded, fully haired ears. Sight, smell and hearing are well developed in all weasels.

Weasels stalk their prey persistently, tracing their scent and pouncing from a few feet away. Since weasels can eat the equivalent of one-third of their own weight within 24 hours, they often kill more than they need, and **cache** the leftovers in **burrows**.

The pelt of the short-tailed weasel, or ermine, consists of short, soft underfur and long, coarse, glossy guard hairs. The long-tailed weasel's fur is short and moderately fine. In summer, for both species, the upper part of their coats is dark brown and the head and legs are darker still. The chin, throat, and insides of the legs range from a white shade to pale yellow. The last third of the tail is black year-round. The brown summer fur turns white in winter to blend into snowy backgrounds. The black tip on their tails flashes in the white snow to distract and confuse attacking predators.

The weasel is scarcely larger than the mice on which it preys. The ermine males are 26.9 to 28.5 cm long and weigh 74.7 to 171.1 g. Females are 22.1 to 26.2 cm in length and weigh 43.5 to 71.5 g. The long-tailed weasel is larger

than the ermine, and about the size of the grey squirrel. Males measure 34.5 to 44.5 cm and weigh 93.3 to 248.8 g. Females are 27.9 to 33 cm long and weigh 80.9 to 121.3 g.

Good swimmers, weasels are also very alert, curious and bold. Ermine, in particular, are likely to stamp their feet when annoyed. All species emit the characteristic musk odour when alarmed.

The ermine's lithe, agile body allows it to move swiftly both above ground and through underground **burrows**. Females hunt in tunnels more than males, which may explain the higher number of males that are trapped. Ermine can also run easily across snow. This ideal predator hunts in a zigzag pattern, progressing by a series of leaps of up to 50 cm each. Ermine investigate every hole and crevice, often stopping to survey their surroundings by raising their heads and standing upright on their hindlegs. They may travel up to 15 km in one night.

Food: Mice, rats, **voles**, rabbits, chipmunks, **shrews**, frogs, lizards, small snakes, birds, bats, insects and earthworms. They also eat birds' eggs and will attack poultry.

Denning: **Burrows** made by other animals, under brush or rock piles or fallen trees.

Predators: Large hawks, owls, foxes, domestic cats, large snakes, coyotes and dogs.



NPS Photo

The brown summer fur of weasels turns white in winter.

SHORT-TAILED WEASEL/ERMINE (*Mustela erminea*)

LONG-TAILED WEASEL (*Mustela frenata*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

Short-tailed weasel, or ermine, in all Provinces and Territories. Long-tailed weasel in southern Canada.

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

5 to 6 years

Mating:

July/August

Young born:

Mid-April/Mid-May

Gestation:

270 days

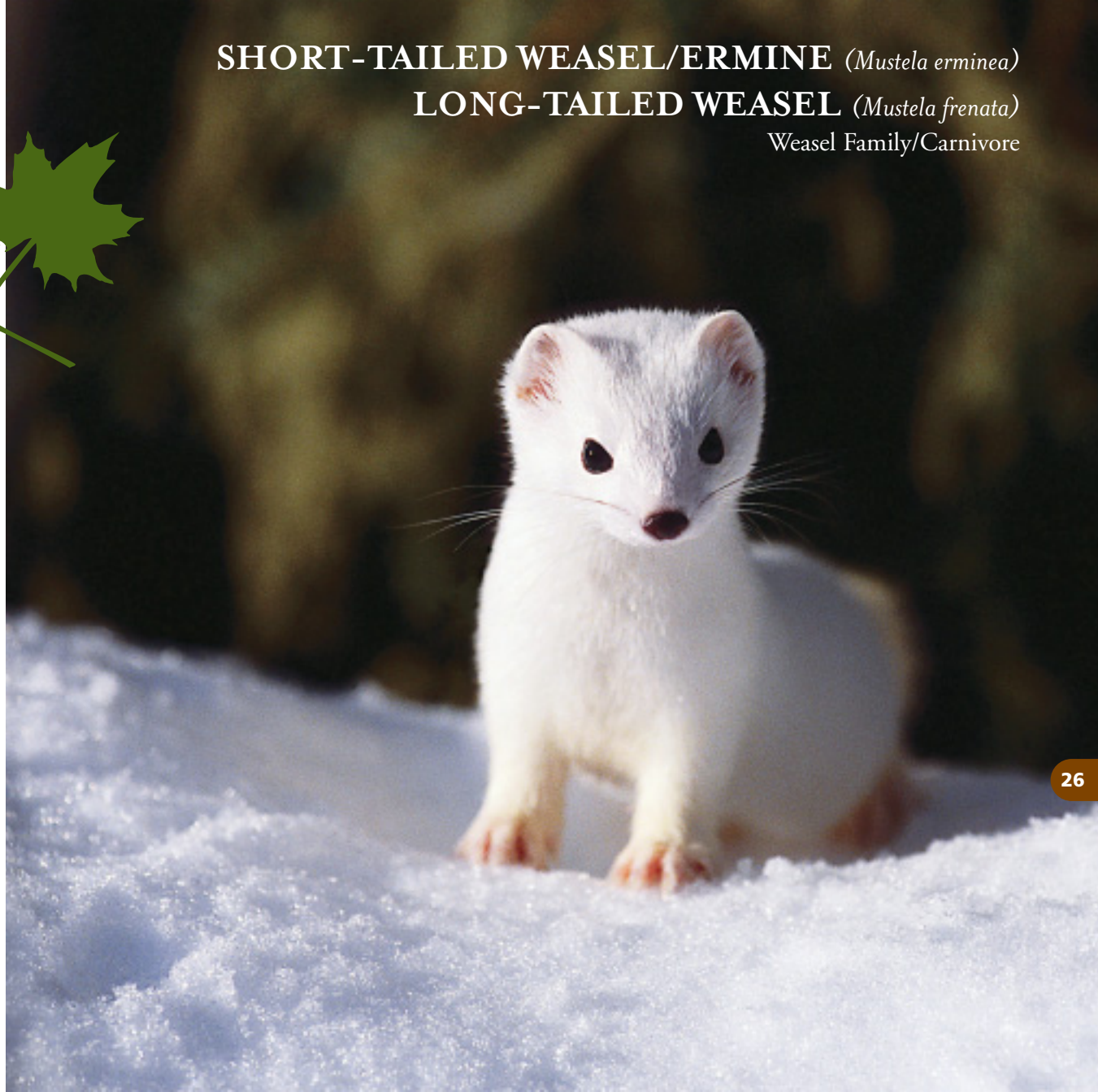
1 litter a year/Average 6 to 7 young

Habitat:

Forest edges, hedges and fence rows in agricultural areas.

Management Issues:

Chicken farmers have problems because a weasel can kill several chickens in little time.



WOLF

(*Canis lupus*)

Canid Family/Carnivore



The helpless newborn wolf is blind and has a woolly coat of greyish-brown or sooty grey. Its eyes open within the first 10 to 12 days, and the adult pelt pattern begins to emerge by the end of the first month.



The pups may leave the den at 1 month of age, but their movements are restricted until they are at least 2 months. **Weaned** at 6 weeks to 2 months, they begin to eat regurgitated meat provided by their attentive parents. The family leaves the whelping den about mid-

July, moving to a summer living area or rendezvous site often located near a **bog** or swamp. As the young become independent, they may either remain with the pack or leave to search for new territory.

Special features: The wolf is about the size of a large German Shepherd, but its legs are **lankier** and its chest is narrower. It has a larger, heavier frame, a broader forehead and a blunter face than the coyote's.

The wolf's front feet are longer than its hind feet, but both sets are large and provide mobility on snowy terrain. The footprints are oval in shape, rather than circular like those of a dog. The tail is generally carried straight back when the animal walks or runs and the ears are rounded. These features help to distinguish the wolf from the coyote, which generally carries its tail down and has pointed ears. The wolf's distinctly slanted eyes are gold, and surrounded by pale fur.

Wolves are shy, elusive animals but within a pack they are very social animals. An average pack consists of 6 to 10 members in a closely regulated unit that contains one dominant animal and a number of subordinates. Each individual

occupies a specific rank in the hierarchical system and is subject to the animal that immediately precedes it in rank. Packs generally contain members of both sexes that may range in age from young of the year to mature adults. Packs are at their maximum during the late autumn and winter.



Wolves travel in packs of 6 to 10 members in a closely regulated unit.

Food: Voles, ground squirrels, young **ungulates**, moose, caribou, elk, deer, beavers, river otters, lynxes, martens, minks, wolverines, coyotes and black bears.

Denning: Hollow logs, caves, and underneath tangled tree roots. Dens are unlined, have 2 entrances and face towards the south.

Predators: Other wolves, large carnivores, particularly bears.

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

2 to 3 years

Average life span:

10 years

Mating:

February/March

Young born:

April/May

Gestation:

63 days

1 litter a year/Average 4 to 7 pups

Habitat:

Boreal forest away from human habitation, rough and hilly areas.

Management Issues:

Wolf packs prey on livestock and can impact prey populations, such as deer, moose and elk. Wolves may also impact populations of other furbearing mammals that it preys upon.

WOLF

(*Canis lupus*)

Canid Family/Carnivore



WOLVERINE

(*Gulo gulo*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



Young wolverines are pale to white at birth and grow quickly. They begin to accompany the mother on foraging trips by 10 to 12 weeks. They may start leaving by 6 or 7 months. Males do not play a part in parental care of the kits.

Special features: Wolverines are powerfully built, like a small short-legged bear. Their back is arched, and tail bushy; their feet are large and furry, with long, slightly retractable claws. Their fur is frost resistant in very cold weather. They are big with a short snout, small rounded ears, small eyes, massive teeth and jaws so powerful that they can easily feed on frozen meat and bone. Their neck is short and powerfully muscled as are their shoulders. Their sense of smell and hearing are good but their sight is poor.

An adult wolverine is about the size of a medium-sized dog. Adult males weigh about 12 to 18 kg; adult females about 8 to 12 kg.

If wolverines were the size of a bear, they would be the strongest animals on earth. Their jaws are strong enough to crush bones. They are capable of bringing down deer or caribou. A cougar will back away if it is challenged for a carcass by a wolverine. They are strong enough to drag an animal carcass three times their own weight for some distance.

Wolverines walk on the soles of their feet like bears and humans. They are not fast runners but can travel over long distances in large home ranges that can even cross over mountains.

Wolverines have been referred to as the “hyena of the north” because they make a large part of their living as scavengers. They travel and look for food

alone, often following the tracks of lynxes, foxes, and wolves, probably in hopes of finding prey remains left by those species. If they find something dead, they eat it or **cache** it, and if it is alive they may try to kill it.

Food: Voles, marmots, ground squirrels, mountain sheep, mountain goats, caribou, **carcass**, fish, birds and eggs, various berries and roots.



NPS Photo

The wolverines' powerful jaws are strong enough to crush frozen bones.

Denning: Uprooted tree, cave, **burrow**, and overhanging bank or snow tunnel.

Predators: Wolves and other large carnivores, the young may be killed by adult male wolverines.

WOLVERINE

(*Gulo gulo*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

Yukon, Northwest Territories,
Nunavut and British Columbia

Maturity:

2 years

Average life span:

8 to 10 years

Mating:

June/July

Young born:

February/March

Gestation:

270 days

1 litter every 2 years/Average 2 to 3 kits

Habitat:

Wolverines are seen in out-of-the-way wilderness habitats, mostly the boreal forests and arctic tundra of the north.

Management Issues:

Low reproductive performance requires close attention to harvest levels, and the maintenance of large habitat areas.



GLOSSARY



Amphibians: Living both on land and in water

Bog: Wet spongy ground too soft to support anything heavy

Bulrush roots: A tall water plant, having a brown cigar-shaped flower head

Burrow: Hole or tunnel dug by a small animal as a dwelling

Cache: A hiding place, structure, or device used for storing food

Carrion: Dead decomposing flesh

Cattail: Bulrush

Crustacean: Having a hard shell and usually aquatic, for example, crab, lobster, shrimp

Culvert: Underground channel, carrying water under a road

Deciduous: Tree that sheds its leaves annually

Estuary: The tidal mouth of a large river, where the tide meets the stream

Gnaw: Wear away by biting

Grouse: Various game birds with plump bodies and feathered legs

Incisor: Sharp cutting tooth

Kit: A young animal

Lanky (Lankier): Ungracefully thin and long or tall

Mottled: Mark with spots or smears of colour

Ptarmigan: Various game birds of Arctic regions resembling a grouse, but with feathered toes and mainly white plumage in winter

Ruff: A conspicuously coloured ring of hair

Semi-aquatic: Living partly on land and partly in water

Shrew: Small insect-eating mouse-like mammal with a long pointed snout

Thickets: A tangle of shrubs or trees

Ungulates: Hoofed mammal

Vixen: Female fox

Vole: A small plant-eating rodent that looks like a rat or a mouse

Wean: Getting used to eating food instead of drinking mother's milk

Yearling: An animal between 1 and 2 years old

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