

North Woods Animals

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Black Bear ~ Black Bears prefer dense woodlands, swamps and mountain areas. They may grow up to 6' in length and up to 3' at shoulder height with males weighing up to 500 pounds or more. The average weight for a male being approximately 300 pounds and a females around 150-175 pounds. Females are typically smaller than the male bear. Black Bears are omnivores eating both plants and animals.

A bears typical diet would consist of insects, small rodents, fish, fruits, nuts and berries. Black Bears are not true hibernators rather just sleep through the winter months. They may occasionally awake from their winter sleep and move about their den but not stray far from it. A bears den may be in a hollow tree, cave, brush pile or beneath a blow down. While in their winter sleep their metabolism slows down considerably and they neither eat, drink, or excrete waste for this period of time. They may lose up to 25% of their body weight while in their den.

Female bears called sows give birth in their winter dens to one to two young in February. Weighing only 8 ounces at birth the young bear will stay with it's mother through the following spring of the next year. Females are bred every other year with breeding taking place in June or July. A healthy bear in the wild may live to be as much as 25 years old. A good place to look for bear tracks in the fall would be near a stand of Beech trees or blackberry thicket in the late summer months. Bears will gorge themselves on these fruits and nuts to put on fat reserves for the long winters months.

Beaver ~ A beavers tail may reach up to 16 inches in length and 4 to 5 inches in width. Contrary to popular belief Beavers do not use their tails as shovels in building their dams. Their tail is used as a brace to help support them as they stand to gnaw a the base of trees. Known for their dam building abilities Beavers are found almost anywhere there is water with an abundance of Poplar or other deciduous softwoods nearby. Beavers are herbivores and do not eat fish as some people tend to believe. They form colonies consisting of the male, female and their offspring.

Their lodge, which which is made from branches, sticks and mud serves as their den. The den is cone shaped usually a short distance from the shoreline. An underwater entrance leads above the water line to a dry sleeping area. The den area may be lined with leaves and grasses.

Beavers mate for life usually from January through March with the female giving birth three and one half to four months later to 2-8 young called kits. The young remain with their parents until about 2 years of age at which time they will be forced out of the family group and relocate to another body of water. A Beaver may live up to 16 years of age in the wild, they will relocate often to another waterway as the wood supply for food is diminished.

Beavers store branches and twigs underwater in a food cache near their lodge for food to be used during the long winter months. Just before sunset is the best time to witness Beavers checking their dams and patrolling their ponds. When alarmed a Beaver will slap it's tail sharply on the water surface to alarm others in the colony of nearby danger.

Bobcat~ Bobcats can reach a weight of up to 40 pounds. They may have a body length of up to 38 inches long with a tail 4-6 inches in length. Their coat is reddish/brown and black spotted. Bobcats favor wooded and brushy areas and are solitary animals. Usually nocturnal they are active throughout the year.

The female may have a different mate each season. Bobcats breed from February through March with 1-4 young born about approximately three to four months later. The young may leave their mothers through the fall or winter of the same year. Their den may be located in hollow logs, caves, rock crevices or brush piles. Rabbits are the main prey of Bobcats but they also prey on rodents, birds, and other smaller mammals. They may occasionally take a fawn deer or weakened adult deer. They may live up to 12 years in the wild. A very elusive animal they are rarely seen by man.

Coyote~ Coyotes have many fur color variations. Generally they are pale brown in color with mixes of gray, black and red in their coats. Their underbelly is white in color. Mostly they resemble a German Shepard in appearance and are of comparative size. Coyotes breed in January through March with 3-10 pups born about 2 months later. The family will remain together at least until the fall of the year. Young females are capable of being bred their first winter.

Found almost everywhere from urban areas to remote forests Coyotes have learned to co exist with mans encroachment into the wild. With a never ending supply of domestic cats and dogs and the recent increase in deer populations the Coyote does not have a lack of food supplies. They also make due with small rodents, rabbits, fruits and berries. They may hunt alone, in pairs or packs at times. Mainly nocturnal they are active throughout the year. A healthy Coyote in the wild may live to reach an age of 13 years.

Fisher~ A male Fisher may weigh up to 12 pounds and be up to 3 feet from nose to tail. The female being smaller in size. They resemble a short legged cat in appearance. Their fur is dark brown to blackish in color. Fishers are found in densely wooded areas. They mate in March/April with 1-5 young born up to one year later. The female will breed again shortly after giving birth to her young. The young leave their mother in the following fall of the same year. Their den is that of a hollow tree, brush pile, rock crevice or ground burrow and they may have several different dens extending over their home range. Only one den is used for birthing and rearing the young.

The diet of a Fisher consists of mice, squirrels, porcupines, raccoons, birds, and other smaller animals. They also may eat berries, fruits and nuts. They are natural predators in tree tops where squirrels make up the bulk of their food. Fishers are also one of the few predators of the Porcupine. Like others in the weasel family when annoyed the Fisher will give off a foul scent in it's defense. They are solitary animals only associating with each other for breeding purposes. They remain active throughout the year both day and night and may live to 10 years of age.

Mink~ A male Mink can grow in total body length to 20 inches with a 5-8 inch tail and weigh up to 3.5 pounds. Females being slightly smaller in size. Mink have a rich dark brown fur with a small amount of white fur beneath their chin. Typically found along waterways, Mink are good swimmers but hunt on land also. They are active throughout the year during daylight as well as night time. Their diet consists of fish, snakes, turtles, rodents, rabbits, birds and frogs.

Females mate in February/March with one or more males and give birth to 3-6 young approximately two months later. Their den is usually a dug tunnel into the side of the bank on a waterway. They will line the living quarters of their den with grasses. They may also inhabit abandon muskrat houses, beaver lodges or hollow logs. The young leave their mother in late summer to early fall of the same year and are sexually mature at 10 months old. Mink are fierce fighters and will also give a foul odor off when annoyed. Their lifespan may be up to 10 years.

Moose~ One of the largest animals roaming the forest standing at heights of up to 7 foot tall at the shoulder and weighing more than 1000 pounds. Moose are found in fresh water areas where they browse on their favorite water plant the Water Lily. They also will browse on woody plants, and grasses. A female Moose will give birth to 1-2 calves in May or June following the fall breeding period. The calves are not spotted as in some deer but are a dull red/brown in color. The calf will weigh between 20 to 30 pounds at birth and will gain up to 5 pounds per day. At 10 days old they can run with their mother and stand at 3 foot tall.

The male Moose carry antlers on their head that can reach a span of up to 6 feet in width. These antlers are shed each winter and a new set begins to grow the following spring. Their antlers are used in defense and for fighting other Moose over the breeding rights of the females (cows). In winter months Moose may congregate in small groups but are usually solitary animals throughout most of the year. Excellent swimmers they can also run up to a speed of 35 mph through open areas. The hooves of the Moose serve as a type of paddle being so broad that it allows them to swim for long distances. Their long legs also make them less vulnerable to the deep snows of winter. A healthy Moose may live up to 20 years in the wild.

Muskrat~ A Muskrat may grow in body length to 15 inches with a 10 inch tail reaching a weight up to 4 pounds. Their tail is scaly with little hair and acts as a rudder when swimming. Their fur is brown on the upper portions and gray on the underbelly side. Muskrats reside near waterways such as swamps, marshes, rivers, ponds and streams. Generally being nocturnal they are active throughout the year. Their den resembles that of a Beavers but smaller in size and made of non woody plants such as grasses. They also may burrow into a stream or river bank.

The female Muskrat may have several litters per year with 4-5 young born per litter. They breed from late winter through late summer. The first litter appearing roughly in late March or April one month after being bred. Young females may breed their first year. While the Muskrat is mainly a herbivore eating plant material, it may also eat shellfish and other small aquatic animals. Muskrats are solitary animals associating only during breeding. They may live up to 10 years of age.

Opossum~ With a body length of up to 20 inches and a 15-20 inch tail the Opossum is not the prettiest of animals roaming the woods today, with a long pointed nose, pinkish white face and scaly tail. Opossums may weigh up to 14 pounds and have a grayish color to their fur. They are however the only Marsupial of North America, meaning they have a pouch like a Kangaroo that it rears it's young in.

The young called kits may number up to 15 per litter and are only 1/2 to 5/8 inches long when born. The female may have up to two litters per year. She gives birth sitting in an upright position licking a path in her fur from her vulva to her brood pouch. The kits make the journey following this trail to their mothers brood pouch where they attach themselves to one of her 13 teats. They remain in the brood pouch for several weeks and may at times ride on their mothers back.

Mostly nocturnal Opossums eat nearly anything they find, from insects to fruit, carrion, rodents, vegetables and garbage. They can easily climb trees with aid of their tails but do not sleep hanging from their tails as some believe. If cornered they may play dead for long periods of time. Opossums leave a distinct track identifiable by their opposing thumbprint. They may live in the wild up to 8 years of age.

Porcupine~ Sometimes referred to as the Woods Pig a Porcupine may weigh up to 30 pounds. They may have a body length of up to 23 inches with a very dangerous tail of up to 7 inches long. A common misconception is that Porcupines shoot their quills, rather they are shed from it's body on contact with it's aggressor. The quills have a white base and are black tipped with a barb on the end. They are actually modified hairs which are hollow and hardened. There are over 30,000 quills on it's body and tail. When provoked the Porcupine will raise it's tail and strike at it's opponent with it.

Females are bred in Autumn and give birth to one young approximately 7 months later. It's quills being soft at birth they begin to harden within an hour. The young at two days old are capable of climbing trees with their mothers. Their diet consists of inner bark of trees and foliage of Hemlock, Spruce, White Pine, Beech, Maple and Birch. Porcupines have a craving for salt and seek out these deposits naturally or manmade.

They are nocturnal and are active throughout the year and may stay in their dens for periods of severe cold in the winter months. They may den in hollow trees, rock cavities or brush piles. The main predator of the Porcupine is the Fisher, they are slow moving animals and are easily caught. They may have a life span of up to 10 years.

Raccoon~ Raccoons may weigh up to 35 pounds with their body reaching 24 inches in length with a 10-12 inch tail. One of the most recognized animals with it's masked face and ringed tail. Raccoons prefer wooded areas near waterways but are just as comfortable in suburban areas. They are nocturnal and remain active throughout most of the year. During cold periods of winter they will remain in their dens and stay inactive, living off their reserve fat supplies. They may venture out to forage during warm spells returning to their den afterwards. Their den may be in a hollow log, brush pile, cave, rock pile or abandoned burrow of another animal. They may have several different dens which they may visit.

Their food consists of nuts, berries, fruit, crops, mice, fish, frogs and crustaceans. If water is

available a Raccoon will dip it's food into it as if giving the impression of washing it off. They are excellent swimmers and readily climbs trees. Raccoons breed in February and give birth to 2-6 young approximately two months later. The young will remain with their mother for up to one year or until a new litter forces them out. Raccoons may live in the wild up to 15 years of age

Red Fox~ A Red Fox may reach up to 14 pounds in weight and a total length of 42 inches from nose to tip of tail. Females are typically smaller. Their fur is golden brown to reddish above with white on it's underside. The Red's legs are black as are it's ear tips with a white tip on the end of it's bushy tail. They prefer to live in wooded to mixed covered areas with open fields.

Females are bred in January/February with 4 to 10 young born approximately two months later. Their den is typically dug into the side of a hill or raised area with sufficient drainage. They also may make use of a hollow log, brush pile or rock crevice to serve as a den. The male takes an active role in raising and protecting the young which grow to full size in 18 months. The young may leave their family unit in late summer to early autumn of the same year. The Red Fox is active throughout the year. Their diet consists of mainly mice but also eat fruit, birds, insects, berries, nuts and other small animals. The fox will store it's food in it's den or may bury it for consumption later. In the wild a fox may live to be 8 years of age.

Gray Fox~ Gray Fox may reach weights of up to 12 pounds with a body length of up to 40 inches from tip of nose to the tip of it's black tipped tail. The female is typically smaller. The Gray Fox's fur is a mix of black and gray above with reddish/brown on the sides. It's underbelly is gray and tawny in color. They prefer deciduous to mixed forests and brushy areas. The Gray Fox is nocturnal and remains active throughout the year.

Gray's mate in February through March with the female giving birth approximately 2 months later to 2-7 young. The male Gray like the Red Fox plays an active role in rearing the young. Female young are capable of being bred at 10 months of age. They den in hollow logs, rocks or abandoned burrows of other animals. Unlike the Red Fox, Gray's can and do climb trees. Their diet consists of insects, mice, squirrels, rabbits, berries, fruits and birds. Fox's regularly mark their territory and one can usually see fox scat prominently displayed on top of a rock, tree stump or log in the forest.

River Otter~ Reaching weights of up to 25 pounds this playful animal may be up to 3 feet long with a 12 inch tail. The female being slightly smaller. Otter fur is a rich glossy brown color. They are found near lakes, streams, ponds, rivers and marshes. Otters are not nocturnal, traveling both day and night.

Females are bred in March through April and give birth to 1-5 young in their den approximately 9-12 months later. The young will remain with their mothers for up to one year or until another litter is born. Dens are usually in the sides of banks or hollow logs and may occasionally reside in abandon beaver lodges. Their diet consists of mainly of fish but may catch muskrats, ducks, birds and other small mammals. If provoked the Otter may give off a foul odor.

These are one of the most playful animals in the wild. Frequently sliding on their bellies down whatever banks and hills they come across. Otters are excellent swimmers and propel themselves in the water with their tails and hind legs. They can out swim and maneuver most fish which enables them their fishing abilities. They will bring their food to a rock, log or on shore to consume it. A Otter may live to 12 years of age in the wild.

Skunk~ Probably the most recognized animal alive today. It's black fur with white stripes will send anyone running for distance. Skunks may weigh up to 14 pounds with a body length of up to 20 inches and a 7-10 inch tail. Females are typically smaller. Skunks are nocturnal and are active throughout much of the year. They will remain in their den through cold winter months living off their fat reserves but are not true hibernators.

Skunks mate from February through March, approximately 60 days later the female gives birth to 4-10 young. They regularly den in excavated burrows in the ground but may make use of hollow logs, brush piles or rock piles. Skunks will line their den area with leaves and grasses. The young may stay with their mother for up to six months time. Skunks are omnivores eating insects, fruits, berries, birds, carrion and small rodents. They may dig for grubs and beetles in softer soils or fallen decayed tree trunks. Both female and male Skunks have a pair of anal scent glands. A skunk can accurately use their scent glands for up to a distance of 16 feet. Their spray does not cause permanent blindness but may temporarily blind the intruder. Tomato juice still seems to be the best remedy to removing skunk odor on pets. Skunks may live in the wild to 10 years of age.

Snowshoe Rabbit~ Snowshoes may reach weights up to 4.5 pounds. Two of the most recognizable characteristics are their fur and their feet. Snowshoes turn entirely white in the early winter months for concealment from predators except for their black tipped ears. Their feet which measure as much as 5.5 inches in length with dense long hair that keeps them on top of deep snows in the winter months to avoid their enemies. The summer coat of the Snowshoe is a reddish brown color. It takes approximately 70 days for their color transformation to be completed. The amount of daylight brings upon the start of their molting process from their winter coat to summer and summer coat to winter. Snowshoes prefer dense coniferous forests and swamps.

The female may have up to three litters per season between the months of May and August. Each litter may contain up to six young. She gives birth to her litter approximately one month after being bred. Young females may be bred the following spring. Snowshoes favor Aspens and Conifers for food. They also eat berries, flowers and other green foliage. Their numbers are cyclical in nature with an abundance of rabbits every 10 years. Their numbers increase and decrease directly to their number of predators in the area. Snowshoes may reach an age of 8 years in the wild.

Cottontail Rabbit~ Weighing up to three pounds the Cottontail gets its name from its short furry white tail that resembles a patch of cotton. They maintain their brown coat throughout the year unlike the Snowshoe. They have many predators to watch out for such as fox, coyote, fisher, weasel, hawks, eagles, owls and other birds of prey. With so many predators chasing these rabbits the Cottontail can replenish its population easily.

The female Cottontail may have up to seven litters per season with 4-7 young per litter 30 days after being bred. The young will stay with their mother for a period of approximately one month after birth. Females from the first one or two litters of the season may themselves be bred the same year. These rabbits unlike the Snowshoe have dens they regularly use. Cottontails do not dig out their own dens, rather they may use an abandoned den of a woodchuck, skunk or fox. They also will den in brush piles or rock piles and crevices. Their feet are much smaller than the Snowshoe and is more adapted at running than its cousin. Their food consists of various green plants, tree bark, vegetables and berries. They may have a life span of up to 8 years if they are lucky enough to survive that long.

Least Weasel (ermine)~ Weighing only about 12 ounces the Least Weasel is an accomplished hunter. Their body being long and slender it affords them to chase their prey right into their burrows and dens. They have a body length of up to 9 inches long with a 4 inch tail. The Ermines winter coat is pure white except for the black tip at the end of its tail. Their underbelly remains white in the summer months with the rest of their coat being brown. This change in fur color is brought on by the amount of daylight both in the winter and spring. Found in many different habitats from fields to deep woods. The Ermines diet consists primarily of squirrels and other rodents but it occasionally will eat insects, snakes, frogs and take a bird for its prey.

They may maintain several different den sites. Often moving into the den of their prey lining them with leaves, fur or feathers from their kills. They also may make use of hollow logs, brush piles and rock crevices for their den. Females are bred in the Fall and give birth to 4-5 young the following April or May. The female young may be bred at 6 months of age. Ermine are active throughout the year both in daylight and night time. They may live to 7 years of age in the wild.

Whitetail Deer~ With a body length of up to 6 feet and a tail up to 11 inches, standing up to 4 foot tall at the shoulder the Whitetail Deer is one of the most graceful animals in the wild. These deer prefer to live on the edge of two different ecosystems. They thrive in mixed woodland areas. Their name is derived from their pure white hair on the underside of their tail that prominently is displayed as they flee from danger.

Whitetails breed during the Fall of the year and give birth to 1-3 fawns in June the following year. Twins are more common after the females reach an age of two and a half years in age. The fawn is spotted and helpless for the first few weeks of their lives. They remain hidden and separate from their mothers. The mother will let the fawn wean every few hours, grooming them and consuming their waste excrements to make sure it remains scent free from predators. Doe fawns will follow their mothers for up to 2 years and possibly longer. They may be bred at one and one half years of age. Buck fawns are driven off by their mothers after one year.

Male deer called bucks grow antlers each summer and shed them later the next winter. The antlers serve as a means of defense and for fighting other bucks for breeding rights to the does. It is not possible to tell the age of a buck by his antler size as many believe. During the winter months Whitetails will gather together to form a deer yard. A deer yard is usually located in dense stands of Cedars and Spruce lowlands where the snow doesn't reach the depths that it would in open hardwood areas. The deer can move about more freely in these areas following trampled trails through the deep snow to reach the browse they need to survive.

A Whitetail's diet consists of fruits, nuts, berries, grasses and the browse from twigs and buds on woody plants. They can reach speeds of up to 30 miles per hour running, jump up to 8 feet in height and over 30 feet horizontally. Whitetails may reach an age of up to 15 years in the wild.

Wild Turkey~ The Wild Turkey is the largest of North America's game birds. Reaching weights of up to 25 pounds and standing at up to 3 feet in height he is of substantial size. Turkeys can be found throughout North America from farmlands to deep woods. Turkeys mate in late April to May with the males strutting, fighting and gobbling for the breeding right to the females. The hen can lay up to 15 eggs, she incubates them for a period of approximately 28 days in a ground nest made of leaves. Young stay with their mother throughout the year. The male will maintain a harem of up to 15 females that he will court and breed with.

Their diet consists of insects, nuts, berries and seeds. Turkeys roost in trees once they are mature enough to fly up to the branches. They will roost there through the night to avoid predators. The Wild Turkey can fly with great speed for short distances, and run equally as fast.