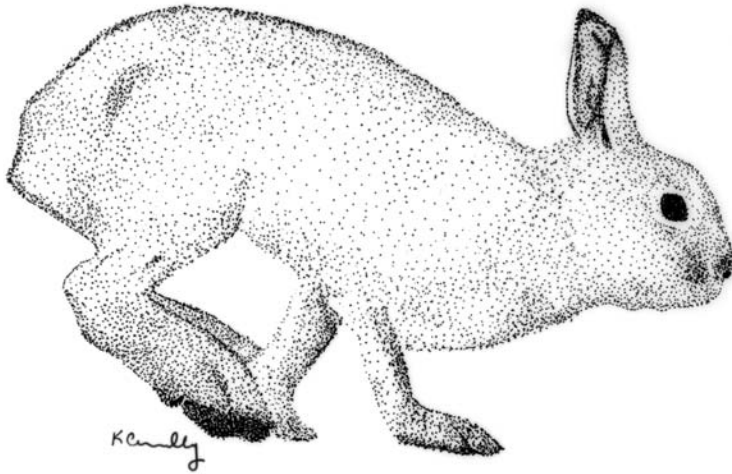


# Mammal Tour

.....  
*on the*  
.....

## Ridge Trail



*Enjoy a leisurely 1 mile hike on the Ridge Trail,  
while learning about our Northwoods mammals!*

*A collaboration of the Cable Natural History Museum and the  
North End Ski Club, with metal mammals by Mark Blaskey.*

*Can you find all of the  
metal animal silhouettes  
along the way?*



*The Mission of the Cable Natural History Museum is:  
Connecting people to Northwoods nature through educational  
experiences that inspire wonder, discovery and responsibility.*

We connect YOU to the Northwoods!

For more information, visit [www.cablemuseum.org](http://www.cablemuseum.org),  
or [www.norwiski.com/northend](http://www.norwiski.com/northend).

Special thanks to Ron Caple for inspiring this project!

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*This program made possible by a grant from the Wisconsin Environmental  
Education Board and by generous donors like you!*



*Illustrations by Katie Connolly and Diana Randolph*

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# American Badger

*Taxidea taxus*

Mustelidae: Weasel Family

The American badger has a flat body with short legs, and a triangular shaped face with a long, pointed nose and small ears on the side of its head. Its long, sharp front claws are well suited for digging. Badgers prefer grassy meadows, old fields, pastures, and open woodland forests. They use a permanent den in the winter, but during the summer they often dig a new den each day.

Badgers are both **carnivores** and **insectivores**, but they tend to feed primarily on small rodents such as ground squirrels, pocket gophers, and mice, most of which they capture by digging into the burrows of these small **mammals**. They will also eat insects and birds, especially when rodent populations are low. They are **nocturnal** animals, but badgers will occasionally leave their den during the day.

Badgers are not true **hibernators**, but spend much of the winter in their den, in cycles of **torpor** that usually last about 29 hours. They emerge from their dens on warm days in the winter.

Badgers are fierce and powerful, with few predators. Their leading causes of death are automobiles, shooting, and fur trapping.

**Try This:** Ask your friends if they know why Wisconsin is called the “Badger State.” Do you know? Back in the 1800s, Wisconsin miners dug tunnels into hillsides as they searched for lead. The miners lived in those tunnels to keep warm during the winter months. This reminded people of badgers.

**Length:** 20 to 34 inches

**Weight:** 9 to 26 pounds



# Northern Short-tailed Shrew

*Blarina brevicauda*

Soricidae: Shrew Family

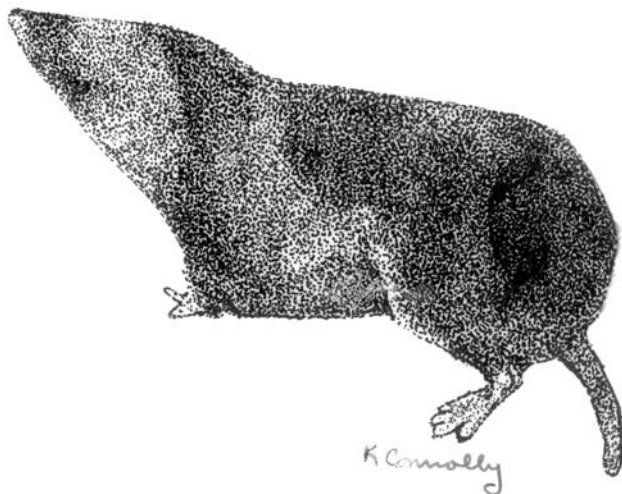
Northern short-tailed shrews have velvety soft fur and a toxic bite. They use strong paws and snouts to tunnel through leaves and snow. Shrews are **nocturnal**. Like bats, shrews use a form of echolocation to “see” in the dark. They send out ultrasonic clicks and then use the returning echoes to perceive their environment. These little **carnivores** have long, narrow heads with a surprisingly large number of teeth. Saliva glands under their tongues produce toxins that help subdue large **prey**, such as salamanders, frogs, snakes, mice, and birds.

Shrews stay active all winter, and must eat 50-150% of their bodyweight daily. By staying underneath the snow, in the **subnivean zone**, shrews avoid some **predators**. Snakes, weasels, foxes, coyotes, hawks, and owls may attack, but shrews will fight or release a stinky chemical to drive the predators away. Shrews only live 6-12 months, but they reproduce very quickly. The young mature in just 2-3 months, and can have 2-3 **litters** of 5-7 babies each year.

**Try This:** Shrews make a wide range of alarm, defensive, and courtship calls (chirps, buzzes, and twitters). Sit quietly near a log and you may hear one.

**Length:** 3 to 4  
inches long

**Weight:** 1 ounce



# Red Fox

*Vulpes vulpes*

Canidae: Dog Family

Red foxes are rusty red with black legs, a white lower jaw, and a bushy, white-tipped tail. They are found throughout the northern hemisphere and have the widest distribution of any canid (dog family). They can live in forests, grasslands, mountains, deserts, farms, and even in cities. In all of those places, red foxes prefer edge **habitats** with a mix of vegetation types. Dens are underground and most often on exposed hillsides or stream banks. Foxes are important for keeping mouse populations under control. They also eat voles, shrews, rabbits, and some fruits and plants. A red fox often hunts mice by standing still, listening, and watching intently. Then it leaps high into the air, and pins the mouse under its front feet. It can even hear and catch a mouse under a foot of snow! Fox **predators** include larger **carnivores** like wolves, coyotes, and cougars.

Gray foxes also live in these woods. They are smaller than red foxes, and have a mix of gray, black, red and white fur. Gray foxes have semi-retractable claws and can climb trees well. They eat more fruit, insects and nuts than red foxes, but mice and small **mammals** still make up most of their diet.

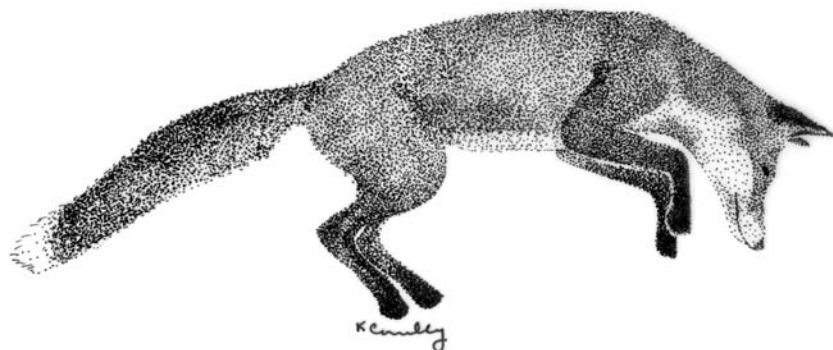
**Try This:** Both red and gray foxes mark their territory by urinating. Look for fox tracks leading up to a little balsam fir tree, with some yellow drops on the snow. Then get down and smell it! Both red and gray foxes have skunky smelling urine.

**Length: Red Fox:** 18 to 35 inches

**Gray Fox:** 31 to 44 inches

**Weight: Red Fox:** 6 to 30 pounds

**Gray Fox:** 4 to 20 pounds



# Fisher

*Martes pennanti*

Mustelidae: Weasel Family

Fishers are the largest of the weasel family in our area. They have been trapped for their dark brown, thick, glossy fur since the 18th century. Fishers prefer dense forests with many hollow trees and fallen logs for dens. They do not **prey** upon fish at all. Their name may be derived from a Dutch or French word referring to a polecat, a European weasel.

Fishers are active during both day and night while hunting snowshoe hares, red squirrels, mice, and voles. They will **scavenge** on deer and moose carcasses and they are one of the few animals that actively hunt porcupines. Fishers will often hide their food and return to it later, eating everything except the large bones. Fishers are excellent tree climbers.

They have few **predators** because of their large size, agility, and ferocity. Young fishers may get eaten by hawks, red foxes, lynx, and bobcats, but humans pose the greatest risk to fishers through fur trapping and **habitat** destruction.

Maternity dens are usually in tree cavities. Fishers are born blind, but can hunt for themselves in just four months, and disperse in five months.

**Try This:** How many hollow trees or hollow logs do you see where you think a fisher could make its den?

**Length:** 29 to 47 inches

**Weight:** 4 to 11 pounds





# North American Porcupine

*Erethizon dorsatum*

Erithizontidae: New World Porcupine Family

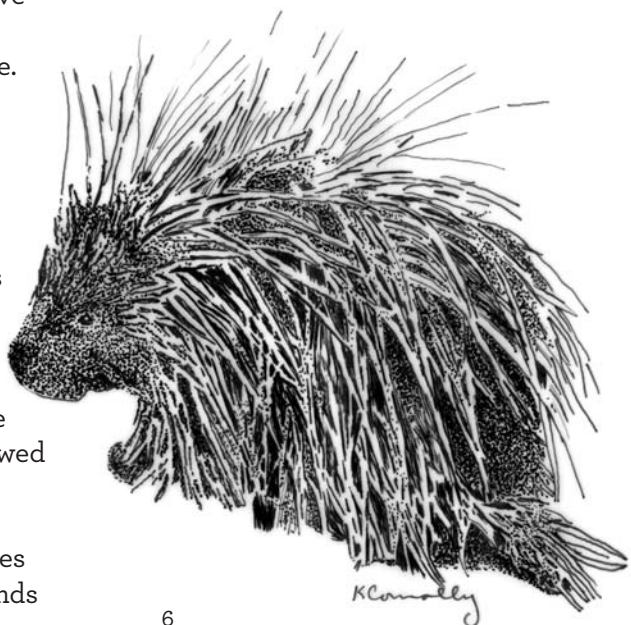
The North American porcupine is a slow-moving, tree-climbing **mammal**. Although they typically live inside tree cavities, they may also inhabit rock piles, upturned tree root systems, or hollow logs. Long claws and a pebbly surface on their footpads allow porcupines to climb quickly and easily. Their favorite foods include: sugar maple buds and aspen catkins in spring; basswood and aspen inner bark in summer; acorns in fall; and hemlock and sugar maple inner bark in the winter. These “quill pigs” also love apples and crave salt. They often annoy people by chewing on axe handles or canoe paddles made salty with sweaty hands, or even on car tires coated with road salt!

The front half of a porcupine is covered in long guard hairs and their rumps are covered in 30,000 quills. The quills can be 1-2.5 inches in length and have tiny barbs at the tip. The porcupine does not throw its quills. Instead, it drives its tail against the attacker. The quills stick in the **predator** and release easily from the porcupine. Porcupines have few predators, but fishers will attack by turning the porcupine over to reach its spineless belly. Porcupines can live 18 years, and females give birth to a single “porcupette” at a time.

**Try This:** Watch for signs of a porcupine nearby. They make a wide trough in the snow with quill drags along the sides. You can also look for bare branches in living trees where the porcupines have gnawed on the bark.

**Length:** 23 to 35 inches

**Weight:** 11 to 30 pounds





# Snowshoe Hare

*Lepus americanus*

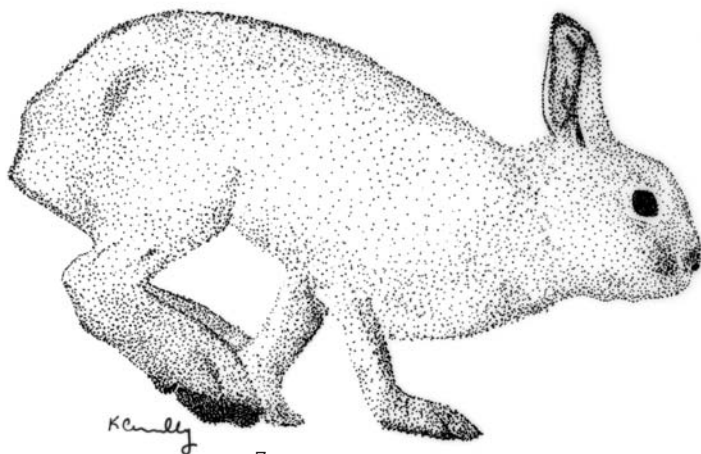
Leporidae: Hare Family

Snowshoe hares are well **adapted** to harsh, snowy winters. Huge hind feet covered with stiff hairs act like snowshoes, and seasonally white fur provides camouflage. Snowshoe hares live in fencerows, swamps, and dense **conifer** forests. In summer they eat many types of plants. Winter foods include bark, twigs, buds, and evergreen needles. Snowshoe hares will even **scavenge** on **carrion**. Snowshoe hares are most active at dawn, dusk, throughout the night, and on cloudy days with low light levels.

Foxes, coyotes, wolves, lynx, and bobcats all pursue snowshoe hares, but the hares are expert escape artists. Large ears and excellent hearing alert them to **predators**. Young hares will freeze in their tracks and blend in with the background. Older hares flee at up to 27 mph, sometimes jumping 10 feet in a single bound, quickly changing directions, and even leaping straight up in the air to confuse predators. Young snowshoe hares are born fully furred and able to run. In contrast, cottontail rabbits are born helpless.

**Try This:** It takes about 10 weeks for hares to change from brown to white, or back again. If a hare is not on schedule with the weather, it may stick out like a sore thumb. As winters warm and become less snowy, will hares be able to adjust? Visit [www.climatewisconsin.org](http://www.climatewisconsin.org) to find out more about the future of Wisconsin's climate.

**Length:** 16 to  
20 inches  
**Weight:** 3  
pounds



# Bobcat

*Lynx rufus*

Felidae: Cat Family

With a stubby "bobbed" tail, fluffy sideburns, spotted coat, and spiky ear tufts, bobcats are distinctive **predators**. They are **adapted** to living in deserts, swamps, and cities, as well as our northern forests. Bobcats hunt rabbits, hares, birds, mice, squirrels, and other small animals. Most of the year they are **crepuscular**, but during the winter both the bobcats and their prey are **diurnal** as well. Bobcats may stalk their prey, or wait for it quietly, and then catch their food in a short chase or pounce.

Adult bobcats have few predators other than humans. In Wisconsin, there is a limited bobcat trapping season. Diseases, accidents, hunters, automobiles, and starvation are the other leading causes of death.

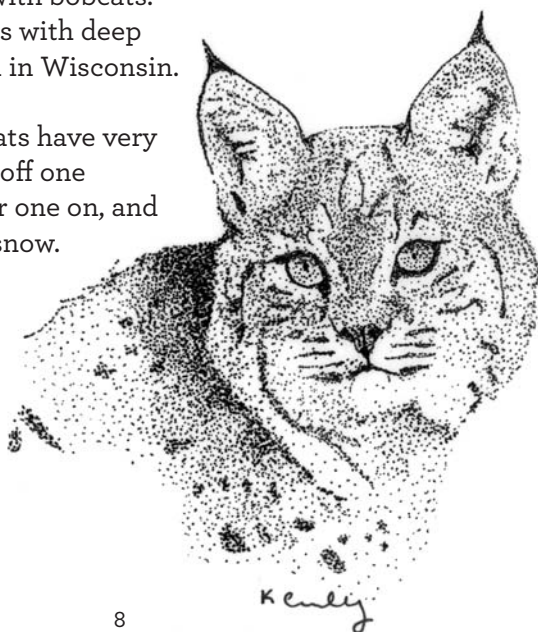
Female bobcats raise their kittens alone. They choose a secluded den for their **litter** of one to six young. The kittens will stay with their mother for up to a year while learning to hunt.

Even with their longer legs and bigger, snowshoe-like feet, Canada lynx are often confused with bobcats. Lynx survive best in areas with deep snow, and are rarely seen in Wisconsin.

**Try This:** Lynx and bobcats have very different sized feet. Take off one snowshoe, leave the other one on, and try walking through the snow. How much does the snowshoe help you walk?

**Length:** 25 to 41 inches

**Weight:** 9 to 33 pounds



# Meadow Vole

*Microtus pennsylvanicus*      Cricetidae: Rat, Mice, Vole, and Hamster Family

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Meadow voles are largest voles in Wisconsin, and the most widespread vole in North America. They look like a mouse with a short tail, small ears, and short face. Voles eat grass, seeds, nuts, bark, tubers, and fruits. They love cranberries, and will even eat meat. Meadow voles are a very important part of the food chain, and have been called the “popcorn chicken of the forest.” Weasels, coyotes, snakes, and foxes eat voles. Owls, hawks, and falcons especially rely on voles as a food source.

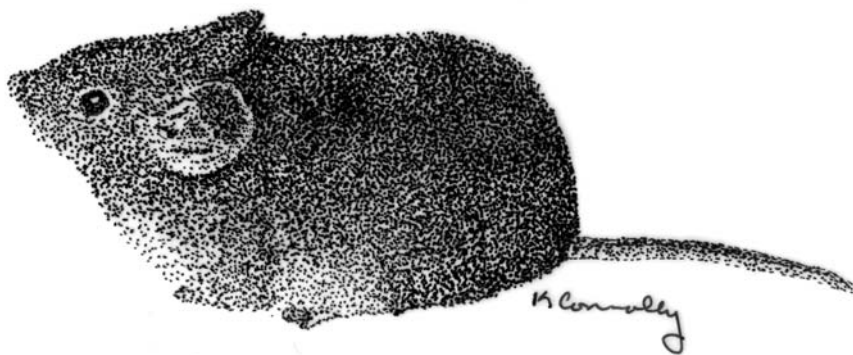
Meadow voles may be active at any time of day, but tend to be more **nocturnal** in the summer and **diurnal** in the winter. Meadow voles are excellent diggers, and create extensive runways through vegetation and under the snow. When the snow melts, you can often see their runways in the grass. Their **scat** helps fertilize the grass.

The average lifespan of a vole is 1-3 months. Voles can breed during every month, and have 4-10 **litters** of about 5 babies each year. Unlike mice, voles don’t become mature at a certain age; they just need to reach a certain weight.

**Try This:** Voles sometimes burrow through the surface of the snow. Look for a trough about 1” wide. Where does it go?

**Length:** 5 to 8 inches, including tail

**Weight:** 2 ounces



# North American River Otter

*Lontra canadensis*

Mustelidae: Weasel Family

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Otters have long, narrow bodies that are streamlined for swimming. They are comfortable on land, but are nearly always found near water where they hunt for animals like fish, frogs, and crayfish.

Otters are known for being social and playful. They normally live in family groups during the summer or in pairs, but will often gather with other otters to dive together, chase each other, or slide on ice or snow.

As semi-aquatic mammals, otters have the challenge of staying warm in winter while swimming in partially frozen rivers or lakes. An oil spread through their fur helps repel water and the fur structure itself keeps their skin dry. Otter undercoats are twice as dense as muskrat or beaver fur, and each hair is textured with spurs and notches that interlock. This forms a dense mat that can trap air and insulate as well as if they had a thick layer of fat.

**Try This:** Find a friend to play with like an otter!

**Length:** 26 to 42 inches

**Weight:** 18 to 25 pounds



# Striped Skunk

*Mephitis mephitis*

Mephitidae: Skunk Family

Striped skunks don't spray their stinky chemicals unless they are really threatened. The bold black and white stripes on their back warn **predators** about potential consequences. When faced with danger, a skunk arches its back, sticks up its tail, and turns its back on the predator. If the predator continues to threaten, a skunk will shoot two streams of fluid from scent glands located just inside the anus. The fine spray can travel up to 15 feet. Thus, skunks are rarely **preyed** on by animals with a good sense of smell. Large birds are not bothered, though, and great-horned owls are skunks' main predators.

Insects compose about 70% of skunks' diets. When attacking a bee hive, skunks wait for the angry bees to emerge from the hive, then bat them out of the air and eat them. Skunks also eat earthworms, snails, frogs, bird eggs, berries, and nuts.

Striped skunks can live in woodlands, grasslands, agricultural lands, and urban areas. They mate from February to April. Skunk babies can spray their musk after just 8 days. It seems fitting that an animal who scientists call *Mephitis mephitis*, which means "stench," would live up to its name almost from birth.

**Try This:** When skunks (and raccoons and bears) walk, they use a gait called a "pace," where both left legs move forward together, then both right legs move forward together. Their flat-footed tracks each show 5 toes. Can you walk like a skunk?

**Length:** 18 to 32 inches

**Weight:** 1.5 to 14 pounds



# American Marten

*Martes americana*

Mustelidae: Weasel Family

The American marten (sometimes known as the pine marten) is the only **mammal** remaining on the Wisconsin's state endangered species list. They were **extirpated** from Wisconsin in the 1920s, due to unregulated fur harvest and widespread **habitat** loss. Since 1986 there has been a cooperative effort to help them recover. Even when they were more abundant, people rarely caught a glimpse of this shy, solitary, **nocturnal** weasel.

Martens prefer mature, dense, coniferous forests. They are excellent climbers and spend much of their time in trees. In winter, American martens also use the **subnivean zone** at the boundary between ground and snow. Martens need a lot of fallen logs in their **habitat** to help them gain access to the subnivean zone. Once under the snow, martens can hunt along the log-lined runways where red-backed voles, mice, shrews, and squirrels also travel. When satiated with a tasty meal, martens have been known to curl up in the den of their **prey** for a nice warm nap.

The snow is an excellent blanket for this lean mammal, who stores little fat and burns lots of fuel to stay warm. Snow also provides cover from other **predators**. The diets of foxes, fishers, and bobcats overlap with martens' diets, and those larger **carnivores** will kill martens to eliminate competition.

**Try This:** Find a fallen log nearby and look closely. Can you see any evidence that animals have been using it for shelter? Look for tracks, pieces of food, or holes in the snow.

**Length:** 12 to 18 inches

**Weight:** 10 to 46 ounces





# Coyote

*Canis latrans*

Canidae: Dog Family

Coyotes are one of the most **adaptable** animals on this planet, and have increased their range throughout North America. While they prefer to live in forests and woodland edges, they have expanded into many other **habitats**, including cities and suburbs. Part of their adaptability is due to the wide range of foods they will eat. Their diet is mostly small **mammals** such as mice, rabbits, and ground squirrels. But they will eat almost anything, including road kill, trash, pet food, and even the pets themselves. Coyotes hunt the smaller animals alone, but will sometimes team up in a small pack to run down a deer. Coyotes are the fastest mammal in Wisconsin, and can run up to 43 miles per hour.

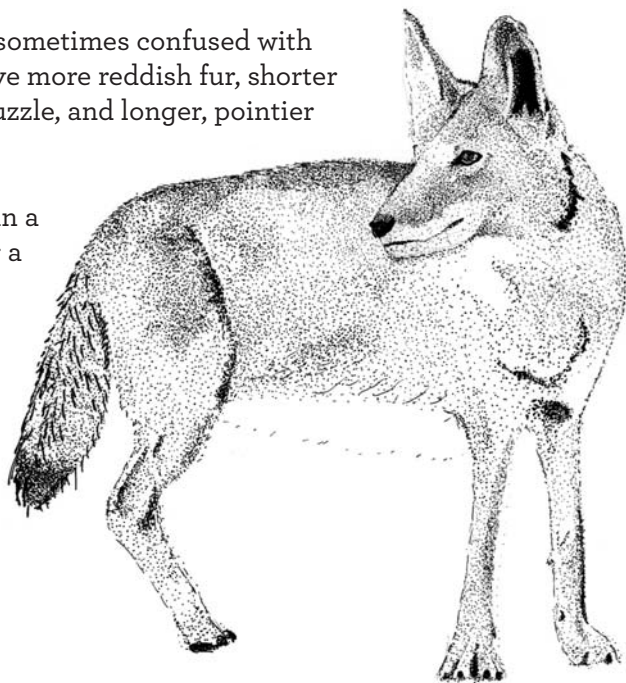
Coyotes howl, bark, growl, and yip to communicate with each other. They come together to play, hunt, feed on **carrion**, and raise young. **Litters** average about 6 pups, and both parents feed them regurgitated food. Young males will usually disperse, while young females may stick around to help raise the next year's pups.

Although they are sometimes confused with wolves, coyotes have more reddish fur, shorter legs, a narrower muzzle, and longer, pointier ears than wolves.

**Try This:** If you're in a quiet area and hear a siren, listen for coyotes to respond.

**Length:** 30 to 40 inches

**Weight:** 15 to 46 pounds





# Long-tailed, Short-tailed and Least Weasel

*Mustela frenata*, *M. erminea*, *M. nivalis*

Mustelidae: Weasel Family

.....

We have three small weasels in Wisconsin: the least weasel (the world's smallest **carnivore!**), the short-tailed weasel, and the long-tailed weasel. Males are bigger than females in each species, so the male short-tailed weasel could be just as big as a female long-tailed weasel. All weasels have a reputation for being fierce **predators**.

Weasels must eat between 30% and 50% of their bodyweight each day. Rabbits, chipmunks, and voles are favorite **prey**, and weasels will follow mice into their burrows. A flexible spine allows weasels to maneuver easily even in tight spaces; sensitive whiskers and a keen sense of smell guide weasels in the underground darkness; and taking over the den of their prey saves them the effort of digging their own burrow. Weasels are important predators that keep rodent populations in check.

Weasels are preyed upon by hawks, owls, snakes, foxes, cats, and more. Luckily, camouflage gives weasels an advantage in the snow. In Wisconsin, all the little weasels turn white in winter and brown in summer. The least weasel is completely white, while the other two have black tips on their tails all year round.

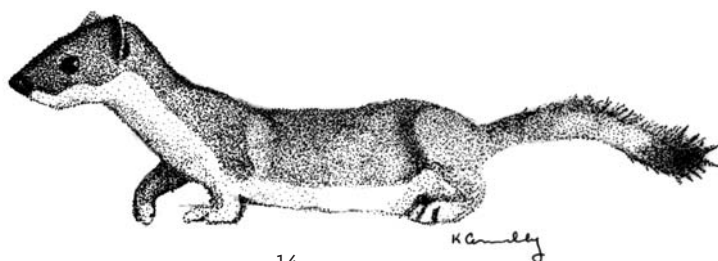
**Try This:** Weasels will sometimes perform a “weasel war dance” by jumping, twisting, barking, and just looking crazy. Why? Scientists don't know, but it may be a weird way to “sneak” up on prey in plain sight. You try it!

**Length: Long-tailed weasel:** 11 to 17 inches

**Short tailed weasel:** 9 to 13 inches

**Least weasel:** 6 to 8 inches

**Weight:** 3 to 16 ounces



# American Black Bear

*Ursus americanus*

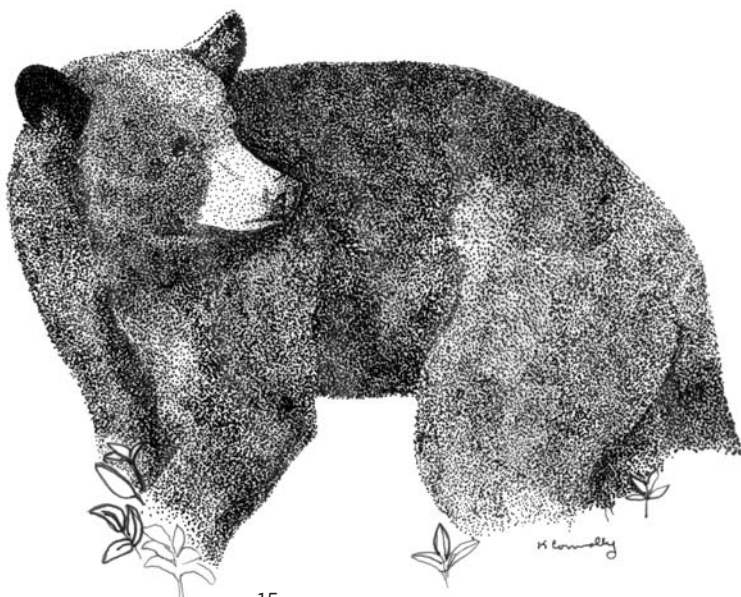
Ursidae: Bear Family

Black bears are the only bear species that live in Wisconsin. Black bears communicate with each other through scent as well as through vocalizations. They are great climbers, and will climb trees if they are feeling threatened or to hide their cubs from danger. Bears eat mostly plants, fruit, nuts, and insects. Only 25% of their diet is meat. Bears have an excellent sense of smell, and strong digging claws. Both **adaptations** help them find food.

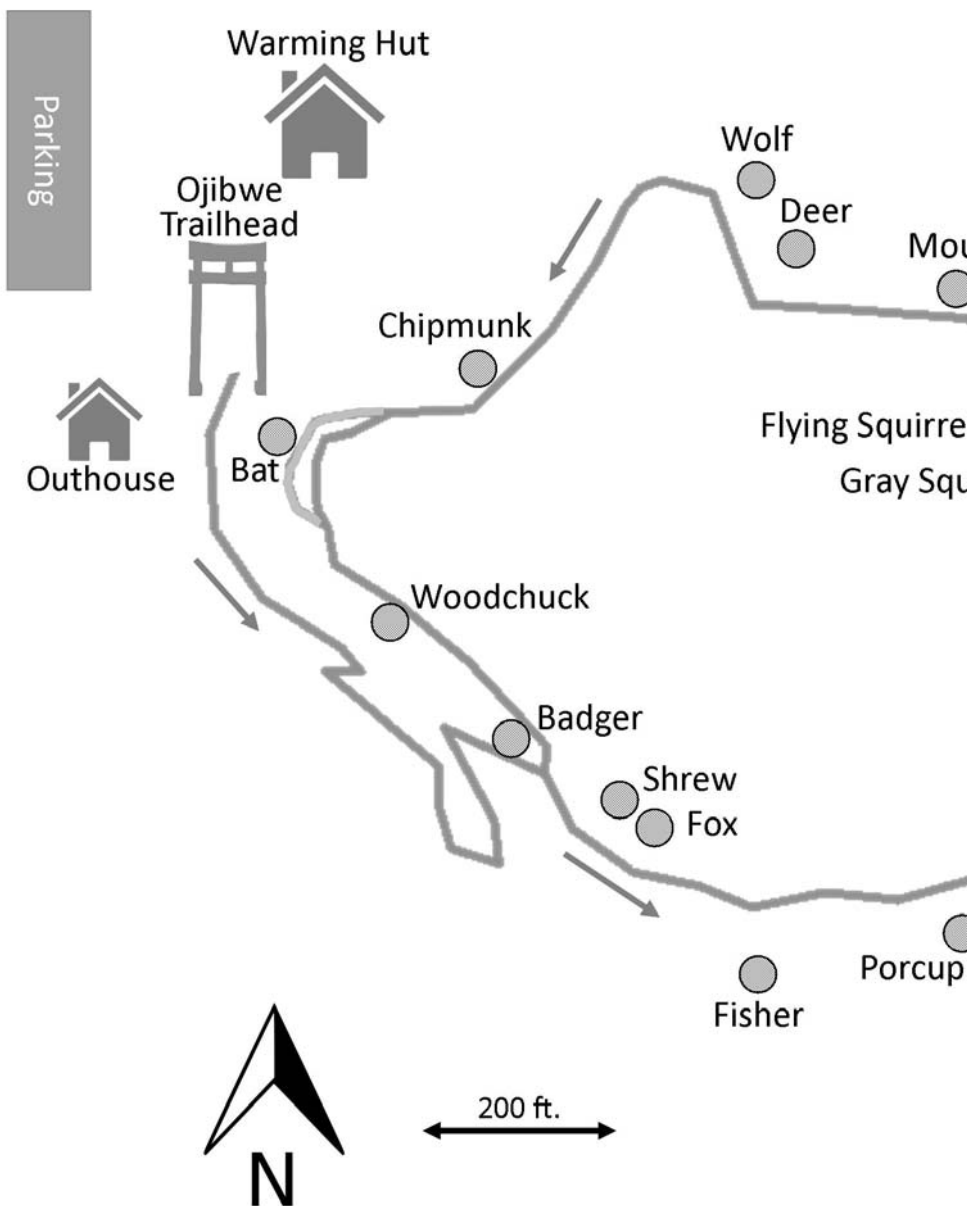
During the winter bears go into torpor, and live off the body fat they accumulated during their autumn feast. This deep winter sleep is not a state of true **hibernation**, because their body temperature and heartbeat do not drop to the near-death state that occurs in true hibernating **mammals**. Mothers give birth in their winter den where the babies nurse and grow. At birth the 2 or 3 young weigh between one-half and one pound each. This makes them the smallest baby relative to adult size of any mammal.

**Try This:** A bear's brain is a third of the size of ours, yet the part devoted to smell is five times larger. They might have the best nose of any land animal. Take a deep breath. What do you smell?

**Length:** 42  
to 80 inches  
**Weight:**  
**Male:** 250 to  
500 pounds.  
**Females:** 86  
to 450  
pounds.



# Mammal Tour on the Ridge Trail



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# Northern Raccoon

*Procyon lotor*

Procyonidae: Coatis, raccoons, and relatives

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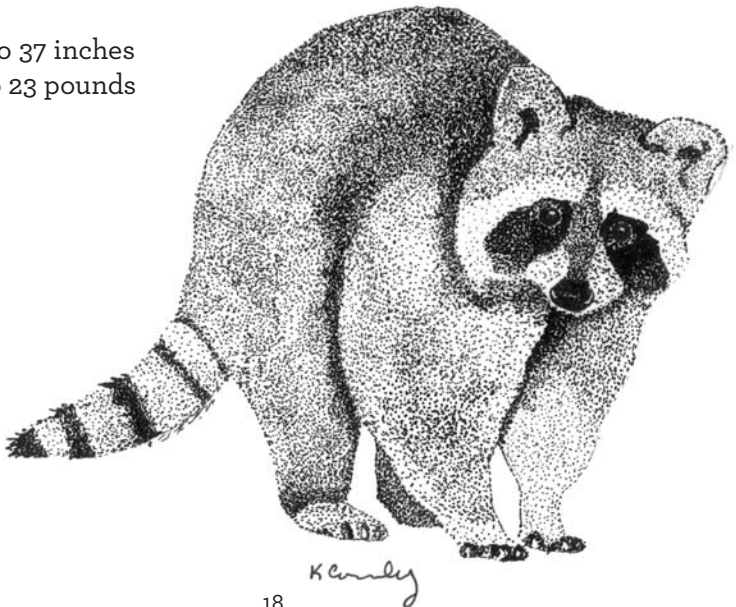
Northern raccoons can be found throughout Wisconsin. These tree climbers are common in forests, fields, and urban areas. Raccoons eat seeds, fruits, garden vegetables, insects, eggs, birds, small **mammals**, rabbits, snakes, crawfish, fish, and anything else that they can catch. To help find, catch, and identify food, raccoons' front paws have an extremely good sense of touch. Little vibrissae (whiskers) near their claws help identify objects before even touching them. Their paws are protected by a tough layer that becomes pliable when wet, and their brain has a large area devoted to interpreting what their paws feel.

Raccoons are most active at night. They den in hollow trees, rock crevices or abandoned buildings, but do not **hibernate**. Raccoons will stay in their den for prolonged periods during very cold weather. Their **predators** include coyotes, wolves, bears, bobcats, fishers, and large birds of prey.

**Try This:** Keep your cat and dog food, bird seed, camping coolers, and garbage cans well secured – even if you live in a city. Raccoons are well adapted to people, and will steal food wherever they can.

**Length:** 24 to 37 inches

**Weight:** 4 to 23 pounds



# Muskrat

*Ondatra zibethicus*

Cricetidae: Rat, Mice, Vole, and Hamster Family

.....

This silhouette is similar to a beaver, but its smaller size and long skinny tail identify it as a muskrat. Muskrats live in lakes, streams, marshes, and even ponds created by beavers. They are typically herbivorous and eat aquatic plants like cattails, but occasionally eat clams, crayfish, or frogs. Their lips can close behind their front teeth so they can gather food underwater while holding their breath.

Muskrats build lodges with underwater entrances by making mounds of vegetation or burrowing into a bank. A whole family of muskrats can huddle in their lodge during winter. The heat from their bodies will keep the entrance from freezing so they can swim out to find roots and tubers to eat under the ice.

**Try This:** Would you want to go swimming under a frozen pond? Close your eyes and imagine what it would look like under the ice.

**Length:** 16 to 28 inches

**Weight:** 1.3 to 4.4 pounds





# American Beaver

*Castor canadensis*

Castoridae: Beaver Family

Beavers are the largest rodents in North America, typically weighing between 35 and 65 pounds. They are natural engineers, modifying habitats to fit their needs. They are more comfortable in water than on land so they build dams with sticks and mud across streams to create slow-moving ponds.

Beavers use their webbed hind feet and wide, flat tail to swim through their ponds where they stay safe from predators like the gray wolf. They find food – aquatic plants, leaves, and tree bark – in and around the pond. With long front teeth, beavers can cut down whole trees to use in their dams or lodges.

By building dams, beavers create wetland habitats for many other species including fish, ducks, deer, and otters.

**Try This:** Beavers can stay underwater for 15 minutes! How long can you hold your breath?

**Length:** 29 to 35 inches

**Weight:** 24 to 71 pounds





# Northern Flying Squirrel

*Glaucomys sabrinus*

Sciuridae: Squirrel Family

Northern flying squirrels don't really fly. They glide on a flap of skin, called a patagium, that stretches between their front and hind legs. These acrobats can turn 90 degrees around an obstacle in the air. A flip of their thin, flat tail directs them upwards for a smooth landing. The squirrel will run to the other side of the tree trunk, just in case an owl spotted it. Hawks, pine martens, weasels, and coyotes also **prey** on flying squirrels. To avoid **predators**, flying squirrels are strictly **nocturnal**, and come out about an hour after sunset.

Northern flying squirrels live in dense **conifer** or mixed forests, and prefer large, old trees with holes to nest in. Lichens and mushrooms are a large part of their diet. They also eat nuts, seeds, fruits, buds, sap, insects, and bird eggs. Flying squirrels are active year round. To stay warm, they will huddle together in a tree cavity. They will usually land on the base of a tree, but sometimes in winter they land on the ground, leaving a full body sitzmark in the soft snow. Northern flying squirrels are a "species of special concern" and a protected wild animal in Wisconsin.

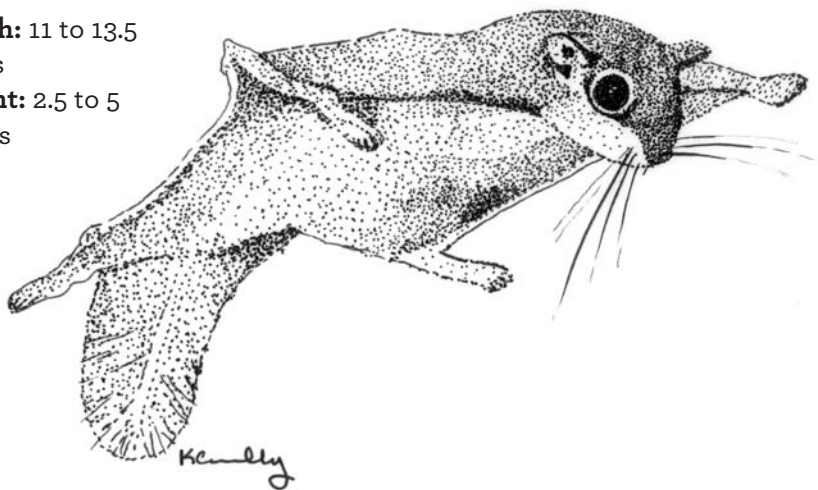
**Try This:** Find a tree with an old woodpecker hole in it. Look up and give it a couple knocks. Is there a curious flying squirrel poking its head out of the door?

**Length:** 11 to 13.5

inches

**Weight:** 2.5 to 5

ounces



# Eastern Gray Squirrel

*Sciurus carolinensis*

Sciuridae: Squirrel Family

Eastern gray squirrels prefer large forests with big trees that produce nuts and provide nesting hollows, but will also live near people. They are active during the day all year round. Gray squirrels are very skilled at raiding bird feeders, but their wild foods include nuts, seeds, mushrooms, tree flowers and buds, flower bulbs, caterpillars, bird eggs, frogs, and even other squirrels. They are “scatter hoarders”, meaning they hide their food in many places. In contrast, red squirrels are “larder hoarders” that store winter food in a few central **caches**. Then they defend those food caches quite loudly! Both red and gray squirrels retrieve their hidden nuts and seeds using excellent spatial memory and smell, but forgotten seeds may grow new trees.

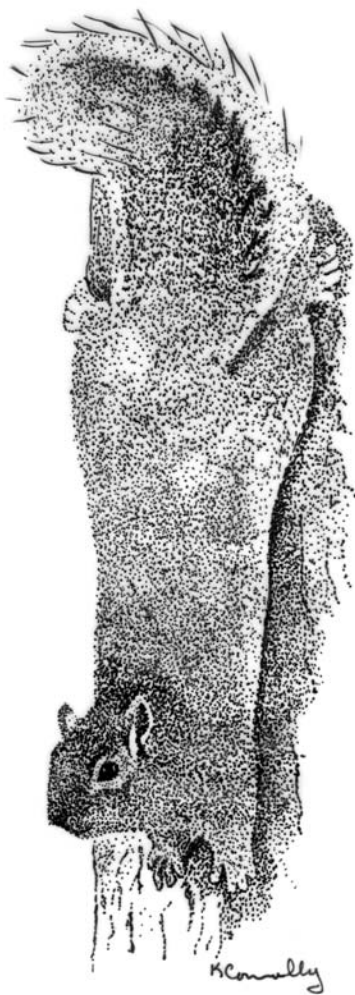
Gray squirrels use their large, fluffy tails for balance, shade from the sun, as an umbrella, a blanket, and as a rudder when swimming. They also use their tails to communicate. Tail flicking accompanied by “kuk” or “qaa” calls are used as a predator alarm. Their main **predators** include owls, hawks, bobcats, weasels, foxes, and coyotes.

Squirrels with black fur, known as melanistic, are common in some areas.

**Try This:** Both gray and red squirrels sometimes leave behind a pile of pine cone scales after they’ve pulled out the seeds. Look around. Can you find a squirrel’s “midden” or garbage heap?

**Length:** 15 to 21 inches

**Weight:** 12 to 25 ounces



# Woodland Deer Mouse

*Peromyscus maniculatus*

Muridae: Mouse Family

Deer mice have excellent senses of hearing, touch, smell, and vision. Mice communicate with each other using all of their senses.

Sometimes a white-footed mouse (a close cousin to a deer mouse) will drum its front paws rapidly on a hard surface, which may be a warning signal to other mice. Deer mice and white-footed mice both have small, reddish brown bodies with white underparts, pointed noses, large ears, and large black eyes. Deer mice have tails with dark fur on top, and white below, while white-footed mice have mostly brown tails. Both species of mice climb and swim well.

Mice are **omnivorous**. They eat insects, plants, seeds, berries, nuts, fruits, and fungi. Mice **cache** seeds and fungi, so they help plant the things they eat! They are active mostly at night to avoid **predators**, but weasels, snakes, and hawks still catch them. Owls and foxes can hear mice moving under a foot of snow, locate them, and pounce without ever seeing their prey. Mice give birth to about five helpless babies each month in the summer. They grow quickly, and are on their own after about 35 days.

Deer mice can carry Lyme disease, and transmit it to ticks that feed on them. Then deer ticks can transmit Lyme disease to you.

**Try This:** Check your pant legs for tiny crawling dots about the size of a sesame seed.

**Length:** 5 to 9 inches, including tail

**Weight:**

0.35 to

0.85

ounces



# White-tailed Deer

*Odocoileus virginianus*

Cervidae: Deer Family

White-tailed deer have reddish-brown coats in summer and more grayish hair in winter. They wave the white underside of their tail as they run, to alert other deer to possible danger. Deer prefer **habitats** with dense thickets for hiding in, and sunny edges that provide good food. Deer forage mostly at dawn and dusk. During the summer they feed on grasses, leaves, and **forbs**. During the winter they feed on buds and twigs of trees and shrubs, relying heavily on evergreens. Too many deer can decrease the number of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, and result in less habitat for songbirds.

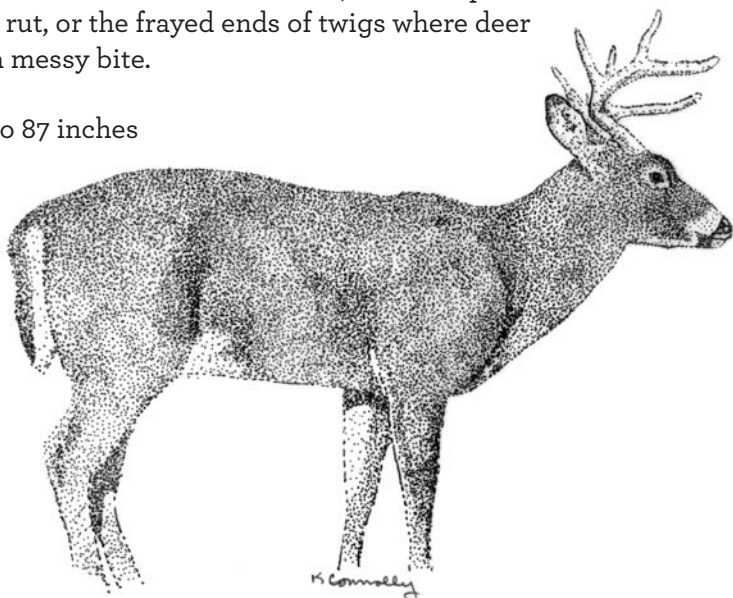
White-tailed deer have good eyesight and acute hearing, but depend mainly on their sense of smell to detect danger. So who are their biggest **predators**? Us! Human hunting accounts for 43% of mortality in deer, starvation accounts for 9%, poaching 8%, coyotes 7%, wolves 6%, and road kill 6%. Hunters spend an estimated ONE BILLION DOLLARS in Wisconsin on activities associated with deer hunting every year.

**Try This:** Look for signs that deer have been here. This could mean heart-shaped tracks in the snow or mud, bark scraped off a small tree by a buck in rut, or the frayed ends of twigs where deer have taken a messy bite.

**Length:** 63 to 87 inches

**Weight:** 125

to 300  
pounds



# Gray Wolf

*Canis lupus*

Canidae: Dog Family

The gray wolf, or timber wolf, is the ancestor to many of our pet dogs. In Wisconsin, wolves were trapped, hunted and poisoned to **extirpation** by 1957. Then in the 1970s a few packs found their way back to Wisconsin from Minnesota. Today, Wisconsin's wolves have recovered, and many packs roam the landscape.

Wolves prefer to live in areas with thick cover and a plentiful deer population. While deer are their main **prey**, about one third of their diet is small prey such as beaver, birds, and even mice. Wolves are a **keystone species**, and their presence helps to keep the entire **ecosystem** healthy.

Wisconsin wolves have highly social and structured packs, with 2-6 members per pack. Wolves are often confused with coyotes and large dogs. Their distinguishing features are a short, blunt nose; long hair on the cheek bones surrounding the face; long, skinny legs; a bulky body; and a non-fluffy tail. Wolf tracks are about the size of an adult human's fist. Adult gray wolves generally have no **predator** aside from humans.

**Try This:** Wolves can't talk like we do, but they still communicate with each other using sounds and body language. Without talking, convey a message to your companions. Try "I want to play!" "Stay away from me." Or "I smell a deer, let's hunt!"

**Length:** 34 to 51 inches

**Weight:** 50 to 175 pounds





# Eastern Chipmunk

*Tamias striatus*

Sciuridae: Squirrel Family

Two species of chipmunks occur together in the Great Lakes Region. The eastern chipmunk has a heavier body and back stripes that do not cross the rump. The stripes of the least chipmunk extend all the way to the end of its tail. Eastern chipmunks are tolerant of people. You'll find their burrows under buildings, as well as in forests with maple trees. The least chipmunk inhabits boreal forests with open stands of pine and aspen trees. Chipmunks eat bulbs, seeds, fruits, nuts, green plants, mushrooms, insects, worms, and bird eggs. They can transport food in cheek pouches, and store it underground in **caches**. They can also carry dirt in their cheeks as they dig tunnels underground. Chipmunks spend the winter in their burrows, taking long naps and waking up to feed on stored food. Chipmunks make several chattering calls and soft "cuk cuk cuk" calls. Chipmunks are **diurnal**. Their **predators** include weasels, hawks, foxes, domestic cats and dogs.

**Try This:** Look carefully when you hear a chipmunk's "cuk-cuk-cuk" in the woods. As loud as the call sounds, the hidden chipmunk shouting it may be very hard to see.

**Length:** 10 inches

**Weight:** 2 to 4 ounces



# Little Brown Bat

*Myotis lucifugus*

Vespertilionidae: Evening Bat Family

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Little brown bats roost in trees, buildings, and bat boxes during the summer, and migrate to caves and mines to hibernate in large groups during the winter. Little brown bats like to live near water. They are the most common bat across most of the country.

Bats are the only flying mammal, and they are not blind! They can see about as well as you. Of course, their most accurate way of “seeing” the world is through their amazing powers of echolocation. Little brown bats shout short bursts of sound into the night. Although the sounds are as loud as a jet plane, they are too high-pitched for us to hear. Short silences between the sounds allow the bats to hear the echo of information coming back. Their brains use the sounds to create pictures of nearby objects—like tasty moths and mosquitoes. Bats can sense objects as thin as human hairs, even in total darkness.

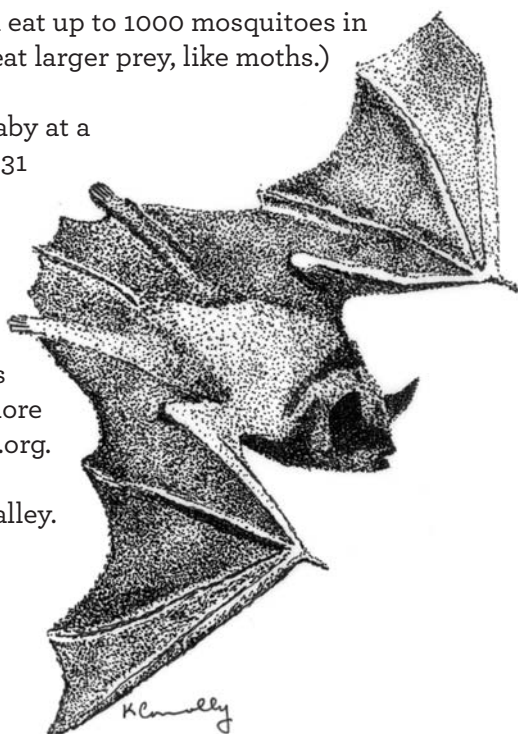
Using echolocation, bats can eat up to 1000 mosquitoes in an hour! (But they prefer to eat larger prey, like moths.)

Female bats only have one baby at a time, and they can live up to 31 years. Little brown bats have few natural predators, but domestic cats can be a problem. A fungus called white-nose syndrome is a major threat to all of our bats that live in caves. Find out more at: [www.whitenosesyndrome.org](http://www.whitenosesyndrome.org).

**Try This:** Shout across the valley.  
Can you hear an echo?

**Length:** 2 to 4 inches

**Weight:** 2 to 5 ounces





# Woodchuck

*Marmota monax*

Sciuridae: Squirrel Family

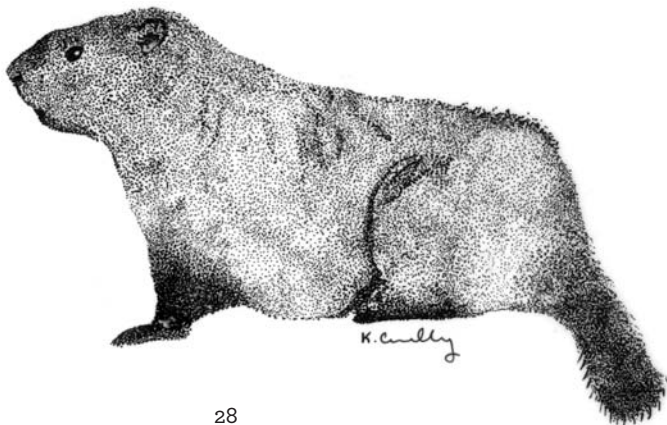
Woodchucks (groundhogs) are also known as “whistle pigs” because of the shrill alarm call they make when threatened. Groundhogs are well adapted for digging, with short but powerful limbs and thick, curved claws. They like to dig their burrows in well-drained sandy soils near open woods or the forest edge. A mound of fresh dirt may indicate a woodchuck’s burrow. They are true **hibernators**, and spend all winter sleeping in their deep winter dens. Woodchucks don’t chuck wood, but they do love to eat garden vegetables, dandelions, clover, and insects. Woodchucks only feed for two hours in the morning, and two hours in the afternoon.

Woodchucks keep a sharp eye out for danger while they feed, and may even climb trees or swim to escape. **Predators** include wolves, coyotes, dogs, foxes, bears, lynx, bobcats, hawks, and snakes. Woodchucks are important to an **ecosystem**, because their old dens provides homes for many different species: rabbits, skunks, raccoons, opossums, foxes, weasels, chipmunks, voles, shrews, mice, lizards and snakes.

**Try This:** Can you see your shadow today? According to folklore, if it’s cloudy when a groundhog emerges from its burrow on Groundhog Day, then spring will come early. If it’s sunny, the groundhog will see its shadow and retreat back into its burrow, and winter will persist for six more weeks. In Northern Wisconsin, however, groundhogs are usually still **hibernating** soundly on February 2.

**Length:** 16 to 26 inches

**Weight:** 4.5 to 13 pounds



# Glossary

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**Adaptation:** Something an animal has or does that helps it survive in its habitat

**Cache:** Verb: to hide food for later;  
Noun: an animal's hiding place for food

**Carnivore:** An animal that eats mostly meat

**Carriion:** The decaying flesh of dead animals

**Conifer:** A tree that produces cones to hold its seeds. Most conifers are also evergreen. Examples include: pines, spruces, and firs.

**Crepuscular:** Active at dawn and dusk

**Diurnal:** Active during the day

**Ecosystem:** A community of living and non-living things that work together

**Extirpated:** Completely gone from a certain region

**Forbs:** Non-woody flowering plants other than grass

**Habitat:** The place where an animal usually lives. Habitats must provide food, water, shelter, and space.

**Herbivore:** An animal that eats mostly plants

**Hibernate:** To spend the winter in a dormant state with a lowered heart rate, body temperature, and metabolism

**Insectivore:** An animal that eats insects

**Keystone Species:** A plant or animal that plays a unique and important role in the way an ecosystem functions. Without keystone species, the ecosystem would be dramatically different or cease to exist altogether.

**Litter:** The group of young animals born to an animal at one time

**Mammal:** A warm-blooded animal with hair or fur that produces milk to feed its babies

**Migrate:** To move from one area to another at different times of the year

**Nocturnal:** Active a night

**Omnivore:** An animal that eats both meat and plants

**Predator:** An animal that that hunts and eats another animal

**Prey:** *Noun:* An animal that is eaten by another animal; *Verb:* To catch and eat another animal

**Scat:** Animal poop

**Scavenger:** An animal that eats dead animals that it did not kill

**Subnivean zone:** A zone between the surface of the earth and the snow above where many small animals live during the winter

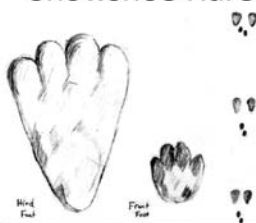
**Torpor:** To spend a short period of time in a dormant state with a lowered heart rate, body temperature, and metabolism

# Mammal Tracking Guide

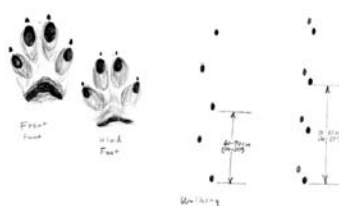
## \*Badger



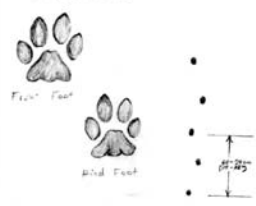
## \*Snowshoe Hare



## \*Red Fox



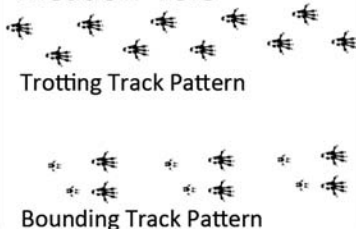
## \*Bobcat



## Short-tailed Shrew



## Meadow Vole



## \*Fisher



## \*Otter



## \*Porcupine

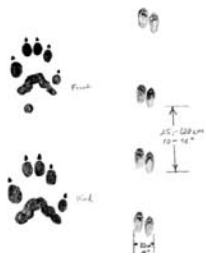


## \*Striped Skunk



Tracks are not to scale.

### \*American Marten



### \*Northern Raccoon



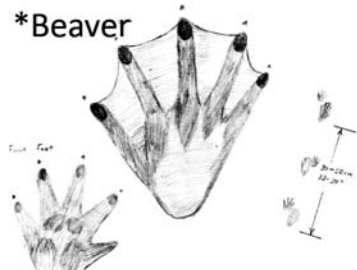
### \*Gray Squirrel



### \*Coyote



### \*Beaver



### Woodland Deer Mouse



### \*Weasels



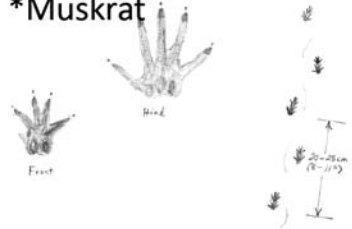
### \*Black Bear



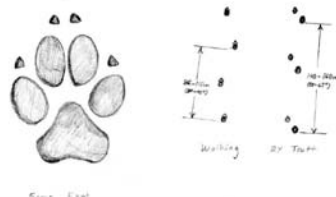
### \*White-tailed Deer



### \*Muskrat



### \*Gray Wolf



### Woodchuck



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