

Mammals at the Environmental Learning Center

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Key Terms Key:

Crepuscular – hair-like extensions of grass seeds for distribution

Forager – an animal that actively searches for food

Gestation – period of development within mother's womb

Herbivore – an animal that feeds on plant matter

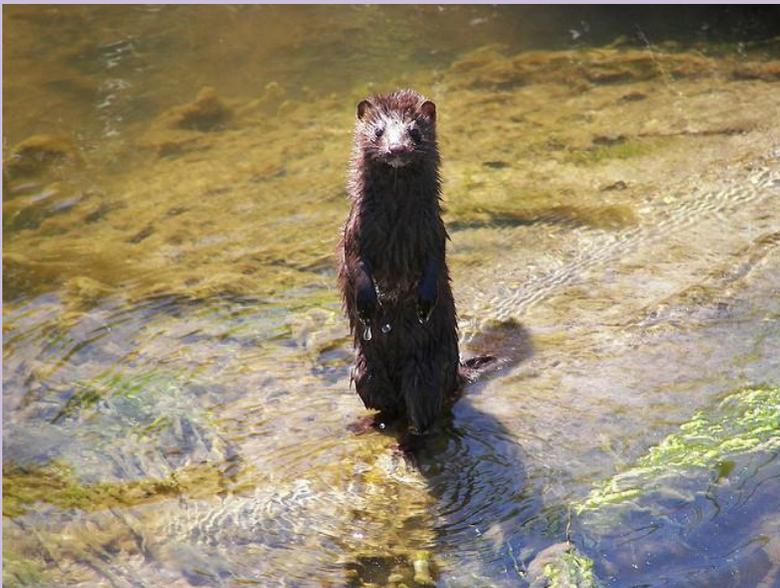
Monogamous – only having one mate at a time

Nocturnal – primarily active at night

Omnivore – an animal that consumes plants and other animals

American Mink (*Neovision vison*)

- **Description**
 - Range from 20-24 inches long and the females to be a little smaller
 - Live everywhere in Colorado but most abundant in the mountains next to beavers
 - Tend to weigh about 3.5 pounds
 - They are dark brown and pale beneath with a black-tipped tail
 - Have partially webbed feet
 - Primarily live in burrows but some will live in dens of muskrats and tree hollows
- **Food**
 - Minks primarily eat muskrats, nestling waterfowl, frogs, salamanders, fish and insects
 - Typically will kill more food than needed
 - Minks will store food in areas especially in the winter
- **Behavior**
 - Minks will occasionally climb trees
 - Males will stay with their last mate and aid in raising young
 - Males will patrol and defend the area of females
- **Habitat**
 - Riparian areas
- **Fun Facts**
 - Mink fur is soft and glossy, historically common in the fashion industry



Common Striped Skunk (*Memphitis memphitis*)

- **Description**
 - 13-34 inches long (including the tail) and can weigh up to 14 pounds
 - Common Striped Skunks have black and white fur; either in a striped, spotted or swirled pattern
- **Food**
 - They are omnivorous foragers
 - They will eat fruits and plants, insects, larvae, worms, eggs, reptiles, small mammals and fish
- **Behavior**
 - They are nocturnal mammals
 - When threatened, the common striped skunk will stamp their feet, growl, hiss, turn their back, raise their tail and spray up to 6 times in a row
 - Females have litters of 2-10 pups in early May
 - Multiple skunks will nest together in the cold and may stay there for several weeks
- **Fun Facts**
 - They are more closely related to canines than rodents
 - A group of skunks is called a “surfeit”
 - Skunks live up to 3 years in the wild
 - Skunks can spray about 15 feet and the smell can carry about a mile away



Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

- **Description**
 - Coyote pelts can vary from grayish brown to a yellowish gray
 - Ears are particularly large in relation to head size
 - Have higher density of sweat glands on their paw pads
- **Food**
 - They are versatile carnivores with a 90% mammalian diet
 - They will typically stick to small mammals
- **Behavior**
 - They are primarily nocturnal
 - Travel in large groups of about 6 closely related adults and hunt in pairs
 - Mark their territory with urine
 - Can live up to 10 years in the wild and 18 years in captivity
 - Coyotes will make high-pitched howls and barks to communicate between each other
 - Usually make long rising howls and or a series of short notes during dusk or night
 - When the pack is together their howls get higher and higher in pitch
- **Habitat**
 - Known to be able to adapt to different habitats
 - Found living in and around large cities
 - Desert scrub, grasslands, foothills, neighborhoods
- **Fun Facts**
 - They have been known to eat domestic dogs and cats
 - Coyotes are quite playful between each other, meaning they often wrestle and fight



Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus maniculatus*)

- **Description**
 - Average of 7.2 inches in length, including tail
 - Upper body gray with colored back or faint darker stripe along middle
 - Bicolored tail (dark above, white below)
 - White feet
- **Food**
 - Seeds, fruit, arthropods, leaves, fungi
 - In winter: 20% of diet is spiders and caterpillars
 - In spring: primarily seeds and insects
 - In summer: seeds and fruit
- **Behavior**
 - Nocturnal; during the day they sleep in tree burrows in nests made of varied plant material
 - Breeding determined by food availability, not by specified seasons
 - They live in individual home ranges that usually do not overlap except for breeding
- **Habitat**
 - Grasslands, brushy areas, woodlands and forests
 - Nest high in large hollow trees
 - Mostly nest alone
 - Range from Alaska to southern Mexico, except in SE U.S.
- **Fun Facts**
 - When resources are limited, deer mice will nest in random areas such as abandoned vehicles
 - Their gestation period last from 22-26 days and their life expectancy is only 1 year
 - In order to communicate, a disturbed deer mouse will rapidly stomp their front feet
 - Usually walk or run, but if pursued, they will leap
- **Fun at the ELC!**
 - Try to identify places in the ELC which might house deer mice (look for high tree burrows or places on the ground that are concealed)

Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)

- **Description**

- Largest tree squirrel native to North America; they grow 24 inches long with a tail that can be up to 11 inches long
- Rusty orange and grey in color with big bushy tails
- Excellent climbers but spend more time on the ground than most squirrels

- **Food**

- Generally eat mast, tree buds, insects, tubers, bulbs, roots, bird eggs, seeds and fungi
- Also will eat agricultural crops such as corn, soybeans, oats, wheat, and fruit if available
- They cache their food by burying it or storing it through the winter

- **Behavior**

- Strictly diurnal
- Large vocabulary, consisting of an assortment of clucking and chuck sounds
- Can jump 15 feet horizontally and 20 feet vertically
- Tree squirrels develop slowly compared to other rodents. At birth, the young are blind, without fur and helpless. Juveniles usually disperse in September or October, but may den either together or with their mother during their first winter
- Males will stand up, fluffing its tail and presses tail up against its back when threatened

- **Habitat**

- Forest patches with understory, or in urban neighborhoods with trees
- Introduced species from the southeastern U.S.
- Thrive among trees that produce winter-storage foods like nuts
- Create tree dens, which are built using old woodpecker nests, or leaf nests, which are preferred during the winter and for raising young

- **Fun Facts**

- Excellent vision and developed sense of hearing and smell. They use scent marking to communicate with other squirrels and have vibrissae, which are whiskers that are used as touch receptors to sense the environment



Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)

- **Description**
 - They are semi-aquatic rodents, so have semi-waterproof coat and webbed feet
 - Muskrats are dark brown in color and can be up to 26 inches in length
 - They weigh up to 2 pounds
 - Their tails are flattened and act as a rudder
- **Habitat**
 - Marshes and low streams
 - Can be found near beavers
 - Build “lodges” made of cattail and can be 3 feet high and 6 feet wide
 - Lodges are only accessible from underwater
- **Behavior**
 - Terrible at walking on land, so easy prey targets. Will hide in water with nose and eyes above water for up to 20 minutes if startled
 - Muskrats usually live in groups consisting of a male and female and their young
 - Females can have 2-3 litters a year, each consisting of about 6-8 young
 - They will build nests that are only accessible from below water
 - Muskrats are mostly active at night or at dusk and dawn
- **Food**
 - Grasses, cattails, bulrush, and other marshy plants
- **Fun Facts**
 - Burrowing can weaken levees and ditch banks
 - Create open waterways for ducks and geese
 - Lodges create rest spots for snakes, turtles, frogs, and ducks
 - As they age, their pelage can turn gray
 - Some Native American tribes predict winter snowfall based off of muskrat nest construction and size



Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

- **Description**
 - Mammal that can be from 40-70 cm nose to tail and weigh from 8-40 lbs
 - Nocturnal, omnivorous scavengers
 - Known for their mask-like markings, ringed tail, and extremely dexterous front feet
- **Food**
 - Invertebrates, vertebrates and plant material depending upon season
 - As scavengers, raccoons will eat almost anything they can find, including trash
 - Often examine food so that they can remove parts that they do not like
- **Behavior**
 - They mate between late January and mid-March when the amount of daylight is increasing
 - Males have been observed forming groups, typically no larger than four, in order to protect themselves against other males and invaders
 - Females will sometimes share the same home areas until they begin to raise young
 - Use scent marking to establish territories
 - Gestation period of approximately two months
- **Habitat**
 - Originally lived in the mixed forests of North America but have moved to mountainous areas, coastal marshes and urban areas
 - Also found throughout Europe and in regions of Japan
- **Fun Facts**
 - They are closely related to the coati of South and Central America
 - In German, the raccoon is called Washbar, which translates to washing bear. This refers to the raccoon act of washing its food before consumption
 - There is no way to distinguish the sex of a raccoon unless young are present
 - Raccoons are thought to be colorblind
- **Fun at the ELC!**
 - Go to sandy areas to look for raccoon prints and point out their very distinct front feet to a companion. Ask them why they think raccoons have such interesting feet; what benefits do they have?



North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)

- **Description**
 - Fur is rich dark brown
 - Feet are webbed and black
 - Paddle shaped tail is black, scaly, rounded, flat, 16 inches long
 - Best way to ID: large size and tail
- **Food**
 - Eats leaves and bark of broadleaf trees. Stashed trees underwater to eat during the winter. Fells trees by gnawing a “waist” until the tree falls
- **Behavior**
 - Slaps water with tail to warn family of danger
 - Uses saplings, sticks, reeds to construct dams in small streams and create ponds
 - In the middle of the pond, they construct lodges up to 6’ high and 20’ wide with a hidden underwater entrance that leads to dry chambers above the water level
 - Active at dusk and night year round
- **Habitat**
 - Ponds, rivers and adjacent woods in the mountains and, less commonly, in the plains. Dens in banks of streams where there are no trees for lodges
- **Fun Facts**
 - North America’s largest rodent
 - Leaves 12 inch territorial scented mounds of mud and grass
 - Rodents have two large incisors on the top and bottom, no canines and a large gap between incisors and molars. The incisors are enameled on the front only and grow continuously throughout the animal’s life; they must gnaw enough to keep them from growing too large
- **Fun at the ELC!**
 - Can you find any signs of beaver activity at the ELC?
 - Beavers are an excellent example of an ecosystem engineer. What does this mean? How do they fit this role?

Beaver dam



Beaver chew



Vole (*Microtus spp.*)

A.K.A. Meadow Mice

- **Description**
 - Resembles a mouse but with a stouter body, a shorter, hairy tail, a slightly rounder head, smaller ears and eyes, and differently formed molars
 - Grows 3-9 inches (7.6-23 centimeters) long
- **Food**
 - They will readily thrive on small plants
 - They will eat dead animals
 - Like mice or rats, they can live on almost any nut or fruit
 - Voles will target plants more than most other small animals, making their presence evident
 - Voles will readily strip small trees and ground cover much like a porcupine. This girdling can easily kill young plants and is not healthy for trees or other shrubs
- **Behavior**
 - Will burrow under plants or ground cover and eat away plant root systems until plants die
 - Vole burrowing disperses nutrients throughout the upper soil layers
- **Fun Facts**
 - Some voles are monogamous, with males helping to raise all litters the female has
 - Some voles can have up to 100 offspring a year



White-Tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

- **Description**
 - 6-7.75 feet tall and weigh up to 300 pounds
 - Adults have reddish-brown coats in the summer. The coloration will fade into a gray-brown during the winter. Fawns have white spots on their reddish-brown coat
 - Their tracks are heart shaped and 3-6 inches long
 - Bucks grow annual antlers in the summer, which fall off during the winter months
 - Tail has a white underside
- **Food**
 - They are herbivores
 - They will eat leaves, twigs, fruits, nuts, grass, corn, alfalfa, lichens and fungi
- **Behavior**
 - They are primarily nocturnal and crepuscular mammals
 - During mating season, bucks will fight over territory and mates using their antlers
 - They have a gestation period of seven months and will have 1-3 fawns in May or June
 - They are preyed upon by larger carnivores such as bobcats, mountain lions and coyotes
 - When threatened, deer will raise and wiggle their tails, and then sprint or jump away
- **Fun Facts**
 - A group of white-tailed deer is called a “herd”
 - They can leap up to 10 feet high and up to 30 feet in distance in one jump



References:

- **Colorado Parks & Wildlife**

<http://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/Mammals.aspx>

- **National Geographic**

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/>

- **Nature Works - PBS**

<http://www.nhptv.org/natureworks/>