

WEASEL FAMILY IN ALBERTA



Wolverine *Gulo gulo*

"Glutton," "skunk bear" and "carcajou (evil one)" are names given to this solitary, seldom seen inhabitant of the mixed-wood and montane zones. Largest of the weasel family, the wolverine reaches 125 cm (4 ft.) in length and may weigh 16 kg (36 lb.).

This animal compensates for its reduced agility with cunning. The bulk of its diet consists of mice, squirrels, grouse and marmots and may include larger animals. If it kills a deer or caribou, the wolverine will stay close to the kill until all edible parts are consumed.



River Otter

Lutra canadensis

The most aquatic of "land" mammals, the otter is well adapted to fishing in cold northern waters. This web-footed weasel has a thick layer insulating fat under its short, dense fur, thus

of
allowing for year-round

activity. Otters have never been abundant in Alberta. Moderate numbers still occur throughout the mixed wood, northern foothill and montane zones.

River otters may be 125 cm (4.5 ft.) long and weigh 11 kg (25 lb.). Because of their size and habits, otters have few natural enemies.



The Small Weasels

Mustela spp.

The small weasels are some of our most beneficial predators, eating mice and other rodents that can

cause problems to

agriculture. The least weasel, in the color illustration, is the smallest living carnivore. It is found in all life zones in Alberta.

Its small size enables it to readily capture moles, mice and shrews. It also eat insects. In winter, least weasels are completely white.



Fisher

Martes pennanti

Though also known as "Fisher cat," "Pennant's cat" and "Pecan," this animal does

not fish nor is it a cat.

The Chippewan Indians knew it best and called it "Tha-cho" or "Big Marten."

Both marten and fisher live in the same areas and are similar in appearance. The fisher is darker and larger than the marten, reaching 5 kg (12 lb.) in weight and 90 to 125 cm (35 to 50 in.) in length. It is possibly the swiftest and most agile of the weasel family. Although the marten can overtake the red squirrel, the fisher can overtake the marten and can outrun the snowshoe hare.

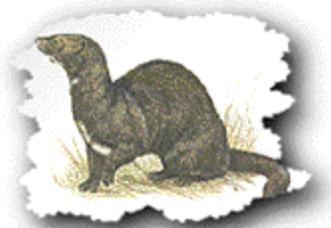
The fisher's diet varies from small birds, rodents, lynx, fox, raccoon and porcupine to young deer and bighorn sheep. It is a nocturnal hunter and is active all year. Due to its agility, both on the ground and in trees, a fisher has virtually no natural enemies.



Badger *Taxidea taxus*

The badger is one of our most beneficial

carnivores. Its thick, stocky body, flat head and heavily clawed feet aid in digging out the mice, ground squirrels and pocket gophers which make up its diet. The distinctive facial markings, short tail and general squat appearance of this large weasel (75 cm [30 in.] long and weighing 7 kg [16 lb.]) make it easily identifiable. The badger was once common throughout the parkland and prairie regions south of the North Saskatchewan River, but its current distribution has been much reduced. This weasel, although able to defend itself against most potential enemies, usually avoids danger by retreating underground. Since most of the badger's prey hibernate during the winter beneath the frozen ground, badgers also spend this season in their dens.



Mink *Mustela vison*

The mink is a semi-aquatic weasel. Its diet includes muskrat, fish, ducks and other small

birds and rodents. It hunts at night and is seldom seen far from watercourses in the mixed wood, foothill and montane zones. The mink weighs about 1 kg (2.2 lb.) and is 65-75 cm (25-30 in.) in length. It uses musk to mark its territory; although the musk smells worse than that of a skunk, it cannot be sprayed for defense.

[Help protect our wildlife and their habitat. When hiking or camping, please take all your trash with you when you leave the area.](#)



Striped Skunk *Mephitis mephitis*

This is possibly the best known, and most respected, member of the weasel

family. The protection afforded skunks by their ability to spray the contents of anal scent glands accurately up to 3 m (10 ft.) has resulted in a peaceful, non-aggressive life style. They are found in all life zones. Although skunks are efficient "mousers," much of their diet consists of insects, eggs, frogs and young birds, making them beneficial to farmers and gardeners. Being nocturnal, they hunt at night and spend the day sleeping in any shelter they find at dawn. The great horned owl is perhaps their only significant enemy.