

# A SAMPLER MAMMALS OF NEW YORK

New York State is home for more than 80 species of native mammals.

An amazingly diverse group of animals, New York's mammals range in size from tiny shrews and bats to large bear and moose. All mammals share these characteristics: they are warm-blooded, have hair, and the females have mammary glands to nurse their newborn offspring.



## BOBCAT

Found in much of New York State, the bobcat is similar in appearance to a very large house cat, except with a short "bobbed" tail.

It has a black spotted tail with a white tip, and short ear tassels. Adult males average 28 pounds, and grow up to 22 inches tall at the shoulder. Bobcats prefer forests, wooded swamps and rocky outcrops. They eat a variety of animals from mice to deer, blue jays to wild turkeys.



## BLACK BEAR

Black bears occur in mature forests scattered across most of New York State. Adults average 2½-3 feet tall at the shoulder and weigh 200 pounds; some reach more than 600 pounds.

Feed on fruits, seeds, nuts, berries, grasses and animal materials, insects, fish, meat, and honey. Spends winter in a den. Cubs remain with their mother for about 1½ years.

## WHITE-TAILED DEER

A popular game mammal and favorite of wildlife watchers, the white-tailed deer gets its name from the bright-white underside of its tail. Adults measure 3-3½ feet tall at the shoulder.

Bucks (males) weigh as much as 300 pounds (though most average half of that), and have antlers which are shed annually. Females rarely have antlers. Eats leaves, twigs, vines, herbs, grasses, fruits, acorns, farm crops, garden produce and lawn shrubbery.

## EASTERN COTTONTAIL

One of New York's most common farm and woodland-edge mammals, the Eastern cottontail is a popular game species and prey for many predators. Adults weigh 2½-3 pounds. They eat tender green vegetation, garden produce, bark and buds of trees, vines and shrubs.



## MINK

A medium-sized weasel, an adult mink averages 1½-2 feet long, and 1-3 pounds in weight. It lives near lakes, streams and swamps, and feeds on small animals.



## WOODCHUCK

A farm field and roadside resident, the woodchuck is a very large, squat squirrel. Adults grow to be about 2 feet long and 10-12 pounds in weight. They feed on farm crops, grasses, herbs and garden produce. They prefer to hibernate for the winter in a burrow located inside a forest edge.



## BEAVER

The official New York State mammal, the beaver is our largest rodent—adults averaging 3-3½ feet long and 30-50 pounds. Beavers build mud and stick dams and lodges on waters across the state. They eat soft, aquatic vegetation and the twigs and bark of trees, especially poplar. When disturbed, they will slap their broad, flat tail on the water's surface.



## FISHER

The fisher is a large weasel that grows to be 7-12 pounds or more in weight and up to 3½ feet long. Fast moving, this dark-furred animal is sometimes misidentified as a black panther or mountain lion. Fishers frequent forested lands and eat birds, squirrels, snowshoe hare and porcupines, as well as carrion.



## GRAY SQUIRREL

A very common woodland, suburban and urban species, the gray squirrel is one of the most readily recognized of New York's mammals. Weighing about 1 pound, they feed on nuts, seeds and other plant material. They build bulky leaf nests fairly high in trees, or may den in tree cavities and buildings.



## STRIPED SKUNK

Well known by its distinctive black and white fur, and its pungent odor, the skunk is a member of the weasel family. Adults average 2½ feet long and 8 pounds in weight. Semi-nocturnal animals, skunks feed mostly at night on insects and small rodents, often along roadsides and in suburban yards.



## MUSKRAT

A common aquatic animal, the muskrat has a long, vertically flattened tail. Closely related to meadow voles and lemmings, muskrats average 1½-2 feet in length and 2-4 pounds in weight. They burrow into stream and pond banks to build dens, and construct food caches of cattail stems and roots, reeds, rushes and grasses for use during the winter.





## RACCOON

Common across New York State, the raccoon is easily recognized by its masked face and bushy ringed tail. Adults can reach 2½-3 feet in length and 30 pounds in weight. In the wild, raccoons eat fruits, insects and a variety of aquatic animals. They catch crayfish, frogs and other water life by probing with their front paws in the water and then manipulating the catch in a washing action. Raccoons den in hollow trees, burrows, rock ledges and buildings.



## WHITE-FOOTED MOUSE

The white-footed mouse is possibly the most abundant and widespread of New York's wild mammals. Adult white-footed mice weigh only one ounce and eat grains, seeds, fruits, insects (including cocoons of moths) and birds' eggs.



## EASTERN CHIPMUNK

A tiny squirrel with a bottlebrush tail, the chipmunk is a common sight in woodlands and suburban backyards. Adults weigh just 2½-4 ounces and measure 8-10 inches in length. Chipmunks eat seeds, nuts, insects and flowerbed bulbs, often filling their cheek pouches and carrying the food to underground dens where they spend the winter.



## RIVER OTTER

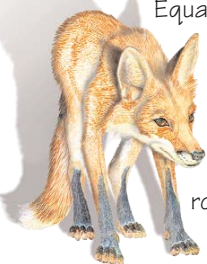
A large, semi-aquatic weasel, the river otter is a graceful swimmer and excellent fisherman that can be seen sliding on mud or snow into the water. Adults grow to be 3-4 feet long and 10-25 pounds, and eat fish, crayfish and other aquatic animals. Due to intensive management and restoration efforts, otter now live in most of the state.

## COYOTE



The coyote is found almost everywhere in New York State except on Long Island. These dog-like animals are highly variable in color, from strawberry blond to nearly all-black, with some looking quite wolf-like. About 20-50 pounds in weight and 4 feet long, the coyote is capable of killing deer or smaller domestic animals, but they usually eat rabbits, rodents, carrion, fruit, birds or insects. Coyotes may den in a ground burrow.

## RED FOX



Equally at home in farm fields and woodlots, the red fox is widely distributed in New York State. It has many color variations, including yellowish-red, black and silver. Adults average 3 feet in length and 10-15 pounds in weight. They are champion mouse-catchers, but also eat other small rodents, birds, insects and fruits.

## LITTLE BROWN BAT

The most common of New York's nine species of bats, the little brown bat is most often seen flying through the last glow of sunset. A small mammal, its 3½ inch body weighs just slightly more than a ¼ ounce; its wingspan measures 8 inches. The little brown bat eats large quantities of flying insects generally the size of a mosquito. Hibernates in caves and abandoned mines during winter.



## LEAST SHREW

One of New York's smallest mammals, the least shrew measures about 3 inches long and ¼ ounce in weight. It is typically found in grassy brushy fields, as well as mouse runways. Insects, earthworms, snails and other small animals make up the bulk of its diet.



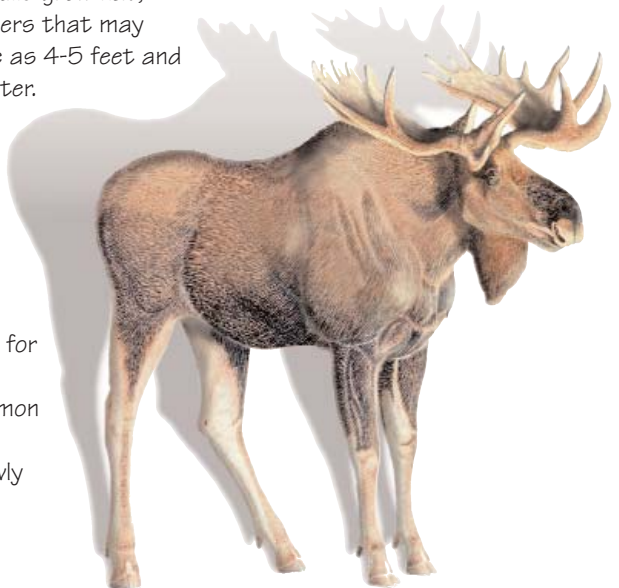
## SHORTTAIL WEASEL

The shorttail weasel ranges in size from 7-13 inches long and 1-6 ounces in weight. It feeds mostly on mice and some small birds. It is exceptionally agile, running up and down large trees to check cavities for prey, or chasing mice and chipmunks in their earthen tunnels. During the winter its coat turns white, at which time it is known as an ermine.



## MOOSE

The largest member of the deer family, an adult male (bull) moose measures 6 feet tall at the shoulder and can weigh as much as 1400 lbs; females (cows) are smaller. Each spring and summer, bulls grow flat, shovel-like antlers that may spread as wide as 4-5 feet and are shed in winter. Moose eat leaves and aquatic vegetation during spring and summer, then switch to primarily twigs for fall and winter. Though uncommon in the state, moose are slowly increasing in numbers.



**Authors: Eileen Stegemann & Jean Gawalt;  
Artwork by Jean Gawalt, Graphics & Layout by Frank Herec**

**NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION**



New York State *Conservationist*, December 2003