

W I L D L I F E

Mammals & Forests

A look at mammals of the forest

WHITE-TAILED DEER



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The Web of Life

Living things in the forest are linked through their food. For example, a bobcat, a squirrel and a plant are linked because the squirrel eats the plant and the bobcat then eats the squirrel. These links are called food chains. A food chain is a series of living things that can be linked together because each one is food for the next. Several food chains joined together are called food webs. Since a mammal rarely eats just one food, a food web is a better way of understanding how connected all the things in the forest are to each other – plants, mammals, birds, trees and insects.

What's for Dinner?

Different mammals eat different types of foods. Where a mammal decides to live depends on what food is available to it.

Many mammals, from deer to mice, live entirely on plant food. They are called herbivores.

Other mammals, such as the bobcat or mountain lion, are carnivores. They feed on other animals.

Mammals such as raccoons, bears – and people like you – are omnivores. This means they can feed on both plant and animal food.



Mammals

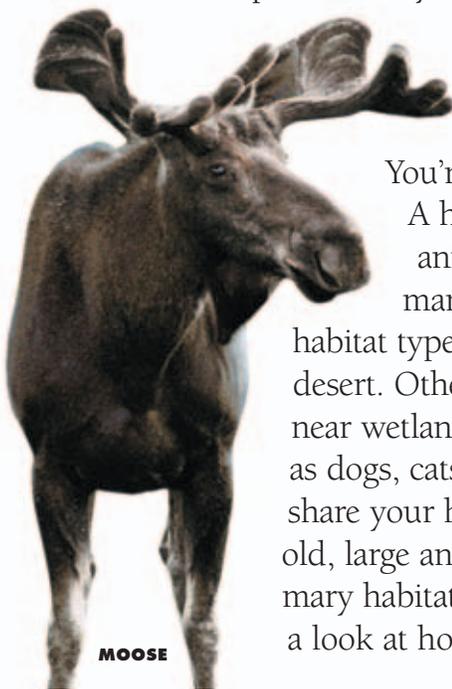
What do we have in common with a bear, a mole, a squirrel ... or even a bat? We're all mammals. Humans are just one of the 4,000 or so different species of mammals on our planet.

Mammals have three characteristics in common:

- they have fur or hair;
- they are warm-blooded, which means that they maintain a constant body temperature rather than adjusting to the temperature of their surroundings;
- in the first few weeks or months of life, mammals are fed on milk produced by their mother.



HUMAN



MOOSE

Most people live in a building – their home. At home, you feel safe. You're in your natural habitat. A habitat is the place where an animal normally lives. Different mammals make use of many habitat types. Some mammals live in the desert. Others spend much of their time near wetlands, and some mammals such as dogs, cats, gerbils and hamsters, often share your home. Forests, young and old, large and small, are one of the primary habitats for many mammals. Take a look at how mammals use the forest.

In The Trees

On The Forest Floor

In Lakes and Streams

Mammals of the Forest



GRAY SQUIRREL

IN THE TREES

Mammals like squirrels and bats live in trees. Other mammals don't live in trees, but they use them either to escape from predators or to prey on smaller animals.

In the summer, squirrels make their nests from leafy twigs on the outer branches. In the winter, squirrels retreat to larger nests built against the tree trunk where they will be protected against the wind.

Mountain lions are good tree climbers. They can leap more than 20 feet into a tree from a standstill and can jump to the ground from 60 feet high.

Gray foxes are the only canines that can climb trees. They often seek refuge in trees and climb to find food.

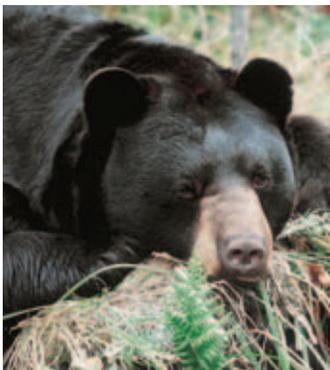


GRAY FOX IN TREE

ON THE GROUND

Most mammals live on the ground. Ground-dwelling mammals tend to need a forest that has a developed understory with a lot of brush, plants and vines for food and shelter.

In the summer, black bears may travel long distances to find food and do not make elaborate dens at every stopping place. As winter approaches, they look for a place protected by rocks or among the roots of a large tree. They dig a secure den, line it with leaves and snooze until springtime.



BLACK BEAR

Raccoons find shelter and protection in old trees that have broken and hollow branches.

Deer like to eat at dawn or dusk at the forest's edge – the place where forests meet fields or one type of forest meets another type of forest. Forest edges have a wider diversity of plant life, making it an attractive area for a lot of forest mammals.

Some animals, like the mole, live underground where they are safe from predators. Moles help the forest because their burrowing aerates the soil. This makes the soil richer and helps grasses and plants grow.



WHITE-TAILED DEER



RIVER OTTER

NEAR THE WATER

Otters look for food along rivers, lakes and coastlines, but can also live, sleep and give birth in the forest. Otters often make their dens in the banks of the rivers.

Beavers live most of their lives in or near water, settling along banks of streams, rivers and lakes bordered by trees. Called nature's master engineers, beavers use their teeth and paws to construct lodges, storehouses, dams and canals.



BEAVER

All mammals featured here live in North American forests.

Making Sense of It.

Mammals have a lot of “good sense.” They use their highly developed senses to live and survive in the forest. Each sense is molded to fit a mammal’s way of life.

For example, while moles have poor eyesight, they have an extremely sensitive muzzle that combines touch and smell to help guide them through the darkness. This allows them to live underground and forage for food.

Many mammals, like foxes, coyotes and mountain lions, have an excellent sense of hearing. They can rotate their ears in the direction of a sound for greater accuracy in pinpointing where the sound is coming from.

They use this ability to help them hunt for food and be wary of potential predators.

Smell is probably the most highly developed sense in bears. When a bear is curious about something, it will stand on its rear legs to better catch smells on the wind.



RACCOON IN DEN

At Home in the Forest

Mammals that live in the forest use this environment for food and shelter. Most mammals can live in a wide range of forest types. Different mammals make use of different types and areas of the forest in order to create homes for themselves.

The kind of plants available is an important factor in determining where a mammal lives. That’s because mammals rely on certain types of plants for food or shelter.

Some mammals live in a den, a special place where they sleep and rear their families.

Other mammals don’t have a special place they call home. They live in a territory called a home range. A home range is a large area where mammals find food and other things they need to survive.

THE LONG, THE SHORT & THE SHARP

Fur, whiskers, wool and spines are all made from hair, one of the mammal’s trademarks. Why do mammals have hair?



PORCUPINE

Furry coats help mammals survive – hair and fur trap air and keep out cold and heat, wind and rain, insulating the mammal’s body from its surroundings.

The sharp quills of a porcupine are a type of hair. Quills help protect porcupines from attack.

Other mammals, like mountain lions, have specialized hair called whiskers that lets them know when they are in contact with an object.

Hair is also used to communicate information. The erect hair on the back of a wolf signals danger. The white underside of a white-tailed deer’s or jackrabbit’s tail is flashed when escaping from danger to either confuse the predator or warn other animals of the presence of danger.



MOUNTAIN LION

Mammals & Forests

W I L D L I F E

ACTIVITIES & Extras

Making Tracks

Many mammals are secretive creatures. Always on the alert for sounds or smells that might spell danger, they can slip away before you have a chance to see them. But by keeping a keen eye on the ground, you can use their tracks to find out quite a lot about their behavior.

A knowledgeable tracker can tell many things from a set of animal tracks: the identity of the animal, its size, weight, age, sex, state of health, when it passed, where it came from, where it was going and which way it was looking.

Deer make heart-shaped prints that are easy to identify. The pointed end of the print indicates the direction of travel.



Bears are flat-footed. They hike the same trails over and over for generations and tend to place their feet in the same place. Each footfall is a depression worn deep into the ground by the passage of many bears over time.



Gray fox tracks show four toes and claws. Front and hind prints overlap each other and often appear as one print.



Squirrels have four toes on the front foot and five on the hind foot.



Bobcat tracks show four toes on both the front and hind foot. Cats do not show their claws in their tracks because they can retract them.

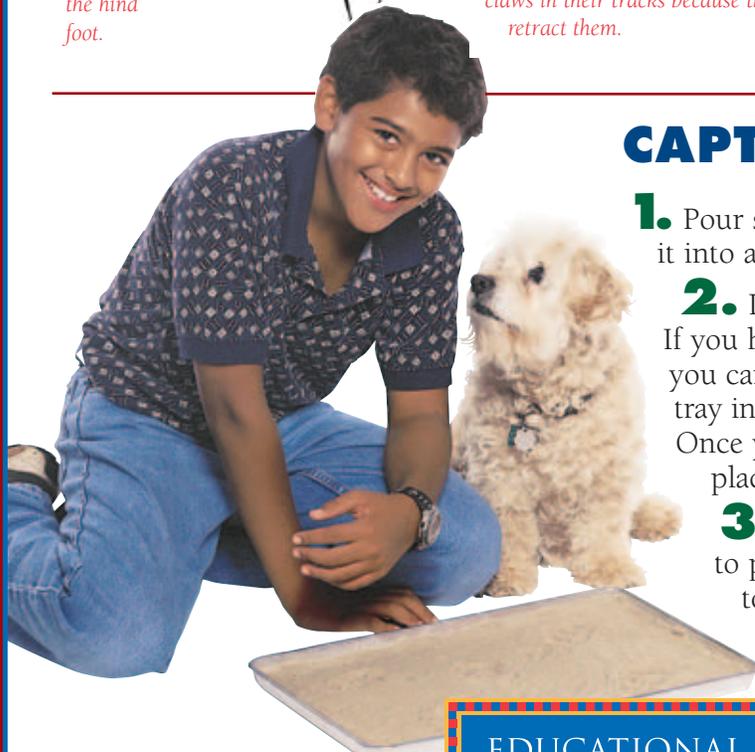


Raccoon tracks are commonly found near water. They have five toes on the front and hind feet and their tracks look like tiny human handprints.



CAPTURING TRACKS

1. Pour some damp sand or mud onto a tray and smooth it into a thin layer.
2. Decide where you want to capture animal tracks. If you have a pet in your house, such as a dog or cat, you can keep the tray inside. If not, you can place the tray in your backyard, your schoolyard or in a park area. Once you decide where you want to track your animals, place the tray with the sand or mud on the ground.
3. Leave the tray out overnight. You might want to put some food on the tray to encourage an animal to walk on the wet sand or mud. Do the tracks resemble any of those shown above?



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WORDS TO KNOW

camouflage - blending in with the surroundings

canine - part of the dog family

den - a safe place within an animal's territory where it can sleep and rear its family

food chain - the organization of how food passes from one living thing to another in an ecosystem

food web - all the interacting food chains in an ecosystem

habitat - a place where an animal typically lives, such as a forest, a prairie or a wetland

predator - an animal that hunts other animals

understory - the shrubs and small trees between the ground and the tops of the tallest trees