



# Snapshot USA Common Species Identification Guide



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## Distinctive Species

### Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

Northern raccoons are a common species almost anywhere in the United States. Their most obvious features are their ringed tails and white faces with mask-like patches around the eyes. Northern raccoons have coarse-looking fur that usually ranges from black to gray, although brown, red, and albino raccoons have been documented. They are well-known for being scavengers, and therefore can live in almost any environment that has water and some sort of shelter. They are extremely curious animals and close-up pictures of raccoon faces are common on camera traps.



### Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)

Virginia opossums are a mainly nocturnal scavenging species found in most of the United States. Their most recognizable features are their white head and long, furless pink tail. These opossums have scruffy looking gray body fur, small, leathery ears, and a pointed pink snout. Virginia opossums are often found in forests and woodlands, but due to their scavenging nature are also found in urban areas. They are the only marsupial found in North America.



## Feral Pig/Hog (*Sus scrofa*)

Feral pigs were first introduced in the United States in the 1500s and have since been detected in 35 states. They are most common and widespread in the southeastern states, from New Mexico eastward, but are also common in California and Hawaii. Their appearance is much like that of a domestic hog and their coloration and coat pattern are variable. They prefer forested habitat with moist soils where they are omnivorous feeders, feeding on grasses, roots, fruits, mushrooms, invertebrates, and carrion.



## Nine-Banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)

The nine-banded armadillo is a nocturnal and crepuscular animal with nine bony skin plates, which give it its name. This species has a long head, prominent ears, short legs, and a tapered and plated tail. Armadillos primarily feed on insects on and within the forest floor, using their nose to go through the leaf litter. They are adaptable to many kinds of habitat including woodlands, fields, and brushy areas, and this ability is allowing them to expand their distribution east and north from Texas.





## North American Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*)

The North American porcupine is the only species of porcupine found in the United States. They occupy coniferous and mixed-forest habitats and can be found in Alaska as well as western and northeastern regions of the continental US. They may also be found in grassland, shrubland, and tundra regions. They are easily distinguishable from other rodents as they are the second-largest rodent species in North America and are covered in protective quills. Their hair ranges from brownish-yellow to black in coloration. North American porcupines are usually found on the ground, but they are also adept climbers and may be seen climbing trees to rest and in search of food.



## Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)

Wild turkeys, known for their distinctive gobbling sounds and flamboyant appearance, are native to the mid and eastern United States. They are overall a dark feathered bird with white and dark brown wings and long featherless legs. The wild turkey has a very slim featherless head and neck, which can differ in color from red to blue. Turkeys usually travel as part of a flock, feeding on nuts and small invertebrates on the forest floor. They commonly live in mature forests. At night, wild turkeys fly into trees as a flock to roost.



## Ungulates

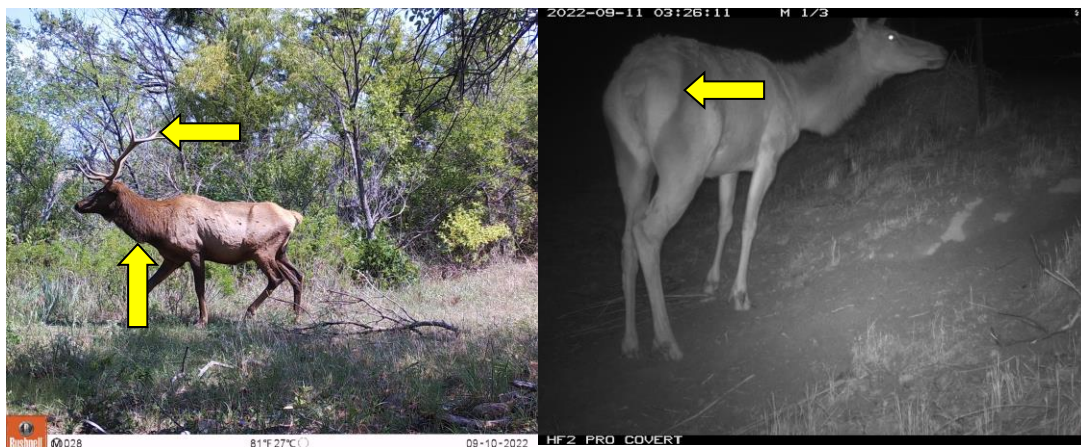
### Moose (*Alces alces*)

Moose are the largest of all deer species. Moose are found in the northern regions of the United States spanning from Maine to Washington and extending up into Canada and Alaska. They prefer forested areas with streams and ponds. Moose have tan to dark brown coats and males are distinguishable from females due to the presence of antlers. Their large and broad antlers can reach up to six feet in width. Moose also have long muzzles which extend over the chin and a noticeable flap of skin that hangs beneath the throat. They are very good swimmers and can be found frequently in the water.



### Elk (*Cervus canadensis*)

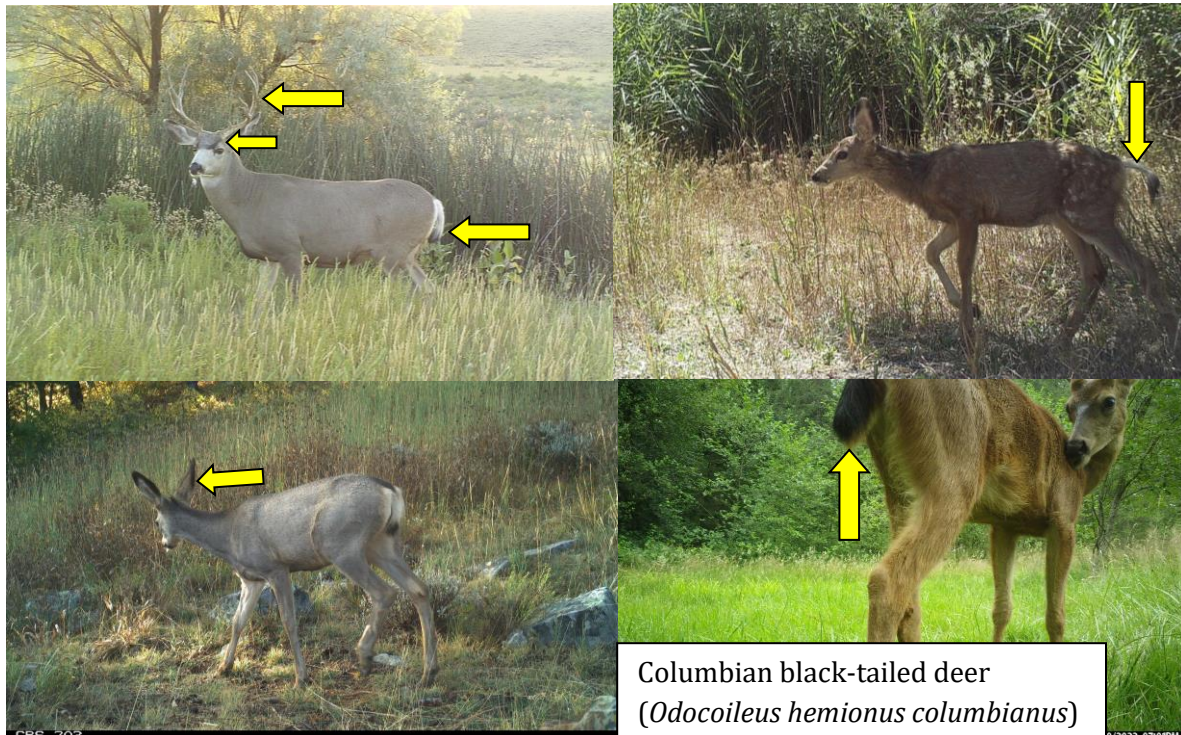
Elk are the second-largest deer species in North America, behind moose. While they are found primarily in the western half of the US in mountainous regions, they have been introduced into many locations in the East and their distribution is growing. Their coloration ranges from light tan to reddish-brown and they have a dark, shaggy mane that hangs from the neck during winter. They can also be distinguished from moose and smaller deer by their light-colored rumps and small, beige tails. Males have large antlers that can reach up to four feet above their heads.





## Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)

Mule deer are restricted to the western half of the US but may be confused for white-tailed deer in regions of overlap. However, mule deer can be identified by their larger ears, black mask on the forehead, white rump patch, lack of white underbelly, and skinny, white tail with a black tip. Males have a forked antler structure, which differs from that of the white-tailed deer. The most noticeable difference is usually the tail, as white-tailed deer have wider, brown tails with white undersides. A notable exception is the **Black-tailed Deer subspecies** of mule deer, found along the west coast, because its tail looks like that of the white-tailed deer, but black on top instead of brown.



## White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

White-tailed deer have a tan to reddish-brown coat in the summer and slightly duller color variations during the winter. Males (bucks) possess antlers during the summer months and shed them during the winter. Their antlers are typically formed as one main beam with single points coming off that beam. White-tailed deer have wide, brown tails with a white underside and white underbellies. Fawns have reddish coats and white spots along their back and sides. White-tailed deer are common in forest habitats but can be found almost everywhere in the United States.



Buck



Doe



Fawn





## Bears

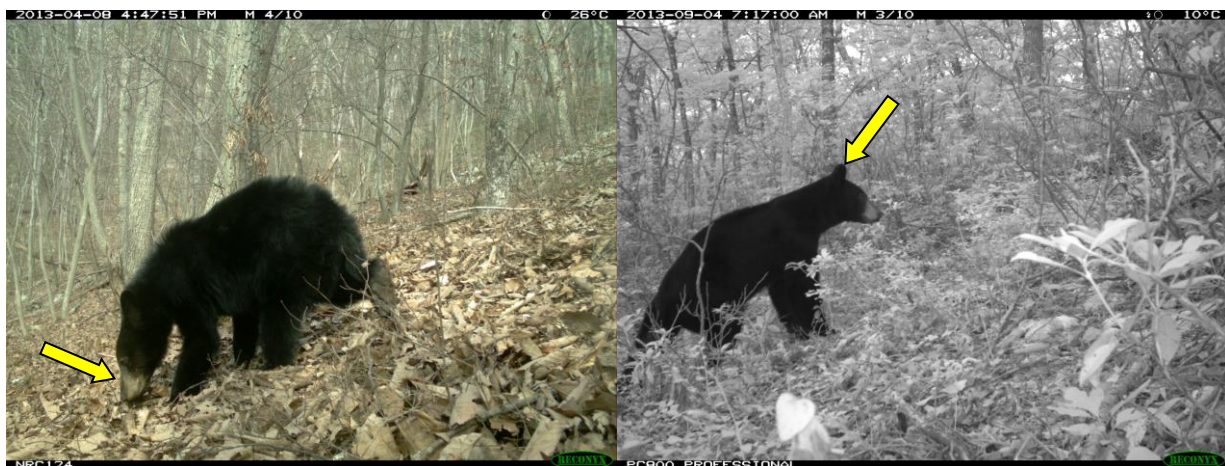
### Brown (Grizzly) Bear (*Ursus arctos*)

Brown bears can be distinguished from other bear species by their distinct hump, dish-shaped face, and long claws. They can vary in color from near black all the way to blonde. The brown bear is highly distributed around the world but its range in the US is limited to the northwestern continental region and Alaska. It is possible for brown and black bears to look similar, so it is important to look for sure signs of a brown bear such as the distinct hump, shorter and more rounded ears, long claws, and a more concave face.



### American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)

Black bears are widely distributed across the United States and can be found in a variety of habitats, but are most common in forested areas. While they are usually black in color, variations of brown and/or tan are known to occur. Most black bears have lighter colored muzzles and/or white patches on their chests. They can be distinguished from brown/grizzly bears by their straight face profile, longer ears, and lack of hump. American black bears are omnivores, but predominantly eat plant matter and scavenge food. Bears are often curious of camera traps and have a reputation for damaging cameras.





## Canids

### Gray Wolf (*Canis lupus*)

Gray wolves are apex predators found in mostly northern parts of the US. While their coats are typically a mix of gray, black, and brown with a black tail tip, they can range from pure white to solid black. They can be differentiated from coyotes by their larger size, thicker legs, smaller and more rounded ears, and broader, shorter snouts. Gray wolves can thrive in a variety of habitats including tundra, woodlands, and grasslands.



### Coyote (*Canis latrans*)

Coyotes are common throughout North America and have a diverse diet that includes fruits and small to medium-sized prey. Their coloration is varied, though typically gray or reddish-brown with a pale throat and belly. They can be distinguished from the foxes due to their larger size, stockier build, longer ears, and longer snout. Coyotes have expanded their range following the persecution of gray wolves in the US and are common in all types of habitats, including urban areas. In areas where they overlap with wolves, they can be differentiated by their smaller size, longer ears, and narrower snout.



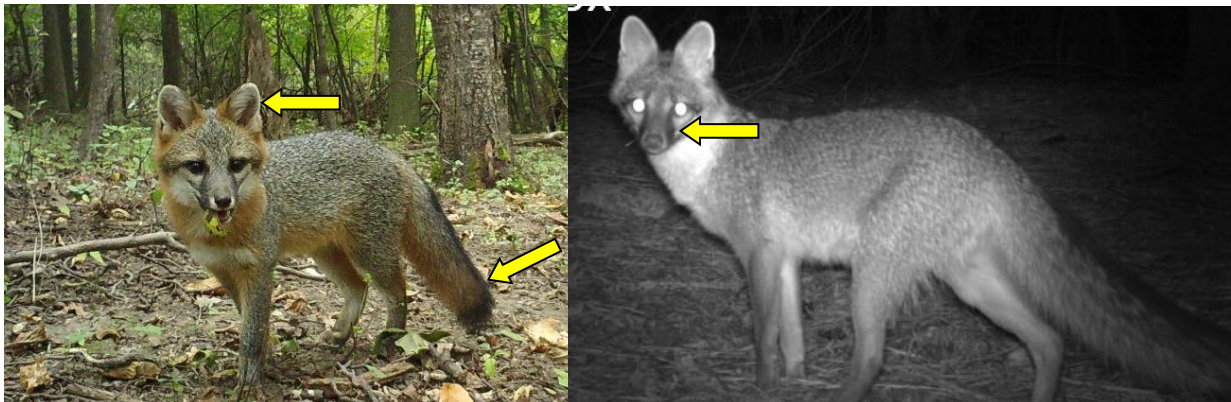
## Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Red foxes are medium-sized omnivores with a highly varied diet. Although they primarily feed on small rodents and birds, they also consume many species of plants. Their fur is usually orange but variations of silver, gray, or black exist. Red foxes usually have a distinctive white tail tip, black “stocking” legs, and black ear tips. These traits all distinguish them from the gray fox. Red foxes are found throughout most of the United States, except for the southwest, and generally prefer a mixture of open fields and brushy or forested areas. These foxes are thought to have declined in the east due to coyote expansion.



## Grey Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

The gray fox is a medium-sized omnivore, eating fruits as well as small mammals, birds, and amphibians. Their fur is gray and orange and they have a distinctive black stripe down their back that ends in a black-tipped tail. Gray foxes readily climb trees, hopping from branch to branch when hunting or seeking protection. They differ from the red fox in their smaller size, shorter legs, smaller and more rounded ears, lack of the black “stocking” legs, shorter and darker snout, and more cat-like appearance. Gray foxes are found throughout most of the United States and into Mexico.





### **Kit Fox (*Vulpes macrotis*)**

Kit foxes are a fox species located in the southwest of North America. In the United States, kit foxes can be found throughout many of the southwest states (CA, CO, UT, NV, NM, AZ, TX) and extend north into Oregon. They are the smallest species of fox in North America. Their coloration is varied, but their fur is typically a mix of tan and gray with a darker back and lighter colored underbelly. They have very large ears that at the extreme can measure roughly 4 inches long. Kit foxes look similar to gray foxes due to their size and coloration, but they can be distinguished by the lack of a black ridge along the tail and their larger ear size.



### **Swift Fox (*Vulpes velox*)**

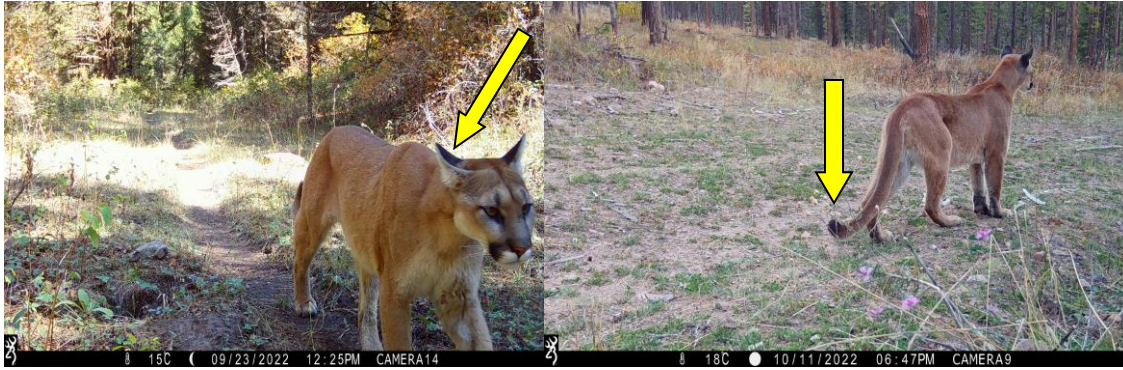
The swift fox is a small fox species found in the western grasslands of North America. In the United States, swift foxes are distributed across the Great Plains. Their coloration varies, but typically individuals have a grayish colored back mottled with yellowish-tan fur. Their underside is typically yellow to white in color. The tail is tipped in black, and they have black patches on their muzzle. Similar to kit foxes, the swift fox also has noticeably large ears. When comparing swift foxes to kit foxes, it can be very difficult to distinguish between the species as they are both very small in size, have similar coloration, have large ears, and have a black tipped tail. However, these species have distinct geographic ranges that only potentially overlap in certain parts of New Mexico and Texas.

## **Felids**

### **Mountain Lion (Puma) (*Puma concolor*)**

The mountain lion is the largest cat species in the US. They have long tails and are typically tan in color, but may range from a grayish beige to a rusty brown. However, they all have lighter-colored bellies and chests as well as black markings on the tips of the tail and ears. Mountain lions are restricted to the western states, with the exception of a small, endangered population in Florida. They prefer areas with dense undergrowth and lots of cover as they are a highly elusive species. They can be distinguished from bobcats and domestic cats by their significantly larger size, very long tail, and long bodies.





### **Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)**

Bobcats typically have a yellow to reddish brown coat marked with dark streaks and spots and a very short tail. Their ears are black-tipped and pointed, with short, black tufts and white spots on the backside of the ear. They primarily hunt rabbits and other small animals during twilight hours and are found throughout almost all North America. Adult bobcats are about two times as large as a domestic cat. They are also distinguished from housecats by their consistent coat coloration and short tail.



### **Domestic Cat (*Felis catus*)**

Domestic cats are an invasive species introduced to the wild by pet owners. They are obligate carnivores and feed on a variety of native wildlife including birds and small mammals. They are about half the size of bobcats with a long tail and a variety of coat colorations. Domestic cats are very widespread and can show up in unexpected places, including wilderness habitat far from urban environments.



## Mustelids

### Fisher (*Martes pennanti*)

Fishers are a large weasel with a golden-brown coat in the summer and a dark brown coat in the winter. The face, neck, and shoulders can be marked with gold or silver colored hairs. Males are typically larger than females and have coarser fur than females. These carnivores are arboreal and terrestrial hunters, feeding on small and medium sized prey including porcupines. They prefer conifer habitat, like that of the boreal forest, but have been observed using mixed hardwood forest in the southern portion of their distribution. They can be distinguished from the American marten by their larger size, darker fur color, less pointed snout, and thicker tail.



### North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*)

North American river otters are large, semi-aquatic mammals with a thick, dark brown coat and silvery to white chins and throats. River otters have a long, sleek tail that tapers to a point and webbed toes on all four feet. They are most often seen at dusk or dawn around marshy or unpolluted waterways, and their diet consists mainly of fish and amphibians.



River otters are highly associated with water but may be seen traveling on land near or between water sources.



### American Marten (*Martes americana*)

American martens are small predators found mainly in the northern regions of North America, where they prefer to live in dense, mature forests. As members of the weasel family, they have long and slender bodies with claws that are sharp and curved. They have yellowish-brown fur, a white or yellow throat patch, large, round ears, dark brown fur on their legs, and a long, furry tail. American marten are larger than mink, lighter brown in color with a distinct throat patch, and have more prominent ears.



### American Mink (*Neogale vison*)

American minks are dark brown, semi-aquatic mammals that are common near waterways in North America. A mainly nocturnal species, American mink are sleek and thick-furred with a long tail and neck. They have webbed toes for swimming on their short, stocky hind legs. American mink usually have small patches of white on their chin or throat but are otherwise a solid dark brown color. They eat a wide range of foods, including but not



limited to fish, eggs, invertebrates, and birds. Mink can be distinguished from the American marten by their smaller size, smaller ears, shorter legs, and darker fur. **Their scientific name on Wildlife Insights is still *Neovison vison*.**



### **Long-tailed Weasel (*Neogale frenata*)**

This is the most widely distributed weasel in the United States; their range extends over most of the country. This weasel is slightly larger than the short-tailed weasel with a proportionally longer, dark-tipped tail (around half their body length) and yellowish-white belly fur. Like the short-tailed weasel, in the northern part of their range they will molt to white in the winter but retain the black tip on their tail. Long-tailed weasels feed mainly on small rodents but are opportunistic predators and will take birds, cottontails, and reptiles if available. **Their scientific name on Wildlife Insights is still *Mustela frenata*.**



### **Stoat/Short-tailed Weasel (*Mustela erminea*)**

Short-tailed weasels are found mostly in northern regions of North America and can be mistaken for long-tailed weasels in areas where they overlap. These species are visually similar but may be distinguished by their tail length, as the tail of the short-tailed weasel is only around a third of their body length. Like their long-tailed counterparts, short-tailed weasels are brown in the summer and white in the winter. However, they always have white bellies instead of the yellowish bellies of long-tailed weasels.



## Skunks

### Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

The striped skunk is the larger of the two genera of skunk found in the United States. They typically have black fur marked with a pair of white stripes running down their back, joining to form a V at the back of the neck. These stripes are thicker and in a distinct pattern, compared with the thin and variably patterned stripes and spots on spotted skunks. Striped skunks are nocturnal hunters that eat insects and small vertebrates in a variety of habitats. They will typically raise their fluffy tail and stomp their front feet before spraying a liquid with a very strong smell.



### Western/Eastern Spotted Skunk (*Spilogale genus*)

Both **Western (*Spilogale gracilis*)** and **Eastern (*Spilogale putorius*)** spotted skunks are significantly smaller than their striped counterpart. While the two spotted skunk species are very similar, they are mostly geographically distinct and are found in their respective regions (Western and Eastern US). Aside from their smaller size, spotted skunks can be distinguished from striped ones by their thin white spots/stripes and black tails with white tips. They hunt insects, mice, and other small animals. When threatened, they will often perform a handstand before spraying a strong-smelling liquid.





### **Hooded Skunk (*Mephitis macroura*)**

The hooded skunk is not widespread in the U.S. and can only be found in the southwest states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. They can be found in a variety of habitats including forests, grasslands, shrublands, and deserts. They are generally smaller than striped skunks, but larger than spotted skunks. Hooded skunks can be observed in three different color phases: black-backed with two lateral white stripes, white-backed with one dorsal white stripe, or all black with sparse white hairs in the tail. They can appear similar to the striped skunk but can be distinguished by their longer tail and longer coat of fur. The long hairs on the back of the neck and head form a “hood,” which gives them their name.



## **Lagomorphs**

### **Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*)**

The black-tailed jackrabbit is common in the western US and is the most widely distributed jackrabbit in North America. They typically occupy mixed shrub-grassland habitat and feed on various shrubs and grasses. Like all jackrabbits, they are large and have distinctive long ears and long, powerful rear legs. Their dorsal fur is brown peppered with black while their

undersides and insides of their legs are creamy white. They can be recognized by their black-tipped ears and the black coloration of the top of their tail.



### **Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*)**

Snowshoe hares are found in the coniferous and boreal forests of the Rocky Mountains, the Appalachian Mountains, the Pacific Northwest, New England, Alaska, Minnesota, Michigan, and Montana. They greatly prefer dense, brushy, and usually coniferous cover, as low brush protects them from predators. Snowshoe hares are rusty brown in the spring and summer but turn white in the winter, to camouflage with their snowy surroundings. In areas where they overlap with cottontail species, snowshoe hares can be distinguished by their larger body size, longer ears, longer feet, and white coloration in the winter. They also always have a gray underbelly and black on the tips and edges of their ears and tail.



### **Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)**

Eastern cottontail rabbits are the most common cottontail in the United States. They are widespread across eastern and south-central US and can be found in a variety of habitats, but prefer meadows and shrubby areas. They eat a variety of grasses and other vegetation. Eastern cottontails are small, have red-brown or gray-brown fur, white bellies, and a small, round, white tail. They can be distinguished from the snowshoe hare by their smaller size, shorter ears, smaller hind legs, and brown fur color in the winter.





**Rodents**

**North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)**

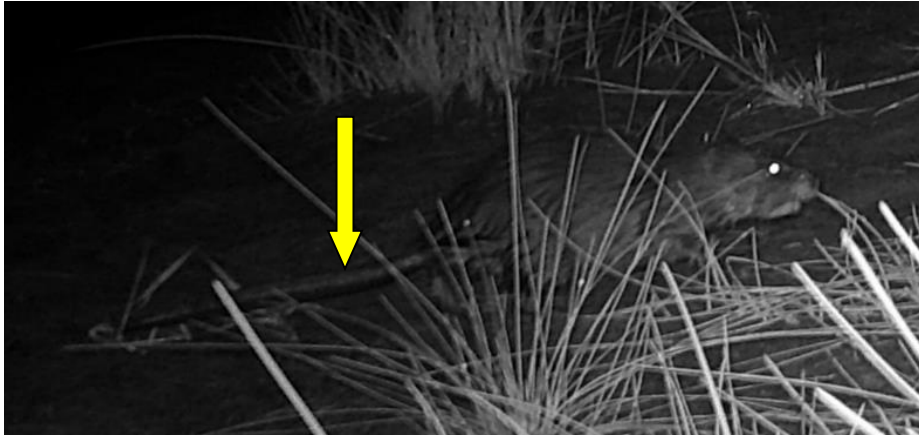
North American beavers are the largest rodent in North America. They are mostly nocturnal and are widely distributed across the United States. They are adapted to their semi-aquatic lifestyle, with large, webbed hind feet and a thick layer of insulating fat. Beavers can be easily recognized by their paddle-shaped tail but may be confused with the smaller muskrat when the tail is not visible. Other distinguishing features include their larger, more rotund bodies and broader heads.



**Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)**

The muskrat is a semi-aquatic rodent spread across most of the U.S., except for parts of the southwest and Florida. They live in family groups and prefer wetland habitat where they create burrows in the banks of streams or ponds. Muskrats are covered in short, thick fur and range from brown to black in coloration. They have long tails that are covered with scales and are slightly flattened vertically, which assists with swimming. Muskrats can be

distinguished from the North American beaver by their skinny, rat-like tails, significantly smaller bodies, and more narrow faces.



### **Woodchuck (Groundhog) (*Marmota monax*)**

The woodchuck is a medium-sized rodent closely related to marmots. They are common in the eastern United States and range from forest edges to open farmland, where they feed on nuts, insects, and wild grasses. Woodchucks are large and chunky with rather stubby tails and a coarse coat that ranges from gray to variations of brown. They have black feet and darker heads, which are broad and flat. As burrowing animals, they dig both simple and complex burrow systems that are 25 to 30 feet long and two to five feet deep.



### **Eastern Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus niger*)**

The eastern fox squirrel is the largest species of squirrel native to North America. They eat a variety of foods including tree seeds, fruits, insects, birds' eggs, lizards, and small snakes. Their color can vary, but the most common coloration is a rusty gray back, rusty yellow or orange belly, and an orange "halo" of fur around their tail. In the southeast, there is a gray morph with rusty limbs, a black head, and white nose and ears. In the south, there can be an all-black morph with white nose and ears.



## Southeast & South morphs



## Most common (Northern)



## Western/Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus genus*)

The **eastern gray squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)** is the most commonly seen mammal in the eastern United States. The gray squirrel has a mostly gray back that may have a hint of red-brown, a white belly, and a large bushy tail with a white/silver “halo” of fur. The gray squirrel can have a black morph in some urban areas. In comparison with the eastern fox squirrel, they are smaller and have a less colorful coat. The gray squirrel usually builds leaf nests in hardwood trees and is common in forested and urban areas. \*\*The **western gray squirrel (*Sciurus griseus*)** looks very similar, but they are two distinct species with distinct distributions. The western gray squirrel is only found on the west coast in Washington, Oregon, and California, which is well outside the eastern gray squirrel’s native range.\*\*





### **American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)**

The American red squirrel is distributed across parts of the northern U.S. and into Canada. In the U.S., they can be found on the East Coast north of Georgia, across the Rocky Mountains, and in the forests in Alaska. Generally, these squirrels prefer coniferous forests. This species can be distinguished by the red fur on their back, black-tipped red tail, white underside, and white rings around their eyes. Compared to other squirrel species, red squirrels usually have smaller bodies and tails.



### **Northern/Southern (Mexican) Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys genus*)**

The flying squirrel is the only squirrel listed in this guide that is active at night. It does not actually fly, but rather glides from tree to tree, sometimes as far as 90 meters away. The squirrel uses a parachute-like membrane connected to its wrists and ankles to spread out and glide. Their diet includes fungi, nuts, fruits, and bird eggs. The flying squirrel is smaller than the gray and fox squirrel, has a less bushy and laterally flattened tail, and a wing membrane with a blackish edge. While Northern and Southern flying squirrels look very similar, they are mostly geographically distinct. The **Southern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys volans*) (Mexican Flying Squirrel)** is in the Eastern US and spans from



Florida to New Hampshire. The **Northern Flying Squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*)** is only found in certain parts of the northern US and overlaps with *Glaucomys volans* in parts of New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire. It is also found in several of the northwestern states.



### **Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel (*Callospermophilus lateralis*)**

Golden-mantled ground squirrels are widely distributed across the western part of North America. The species can be found in forests, meadows, and areas with lots of ground cover. They are omnivorous, feeding on nuts, vegetation, insects, and small vertebrates. Golden-mantled ground squirrels have a reddish-gold head/neck, gray to brown body, pale rings around their eyes, and a black-bordered white stripe that runs down both sides of their back. They can be distinguished from chipmunk species by their larger size and lack of facial stripes.



### **Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*)**

Eastern chipmunks are one of 25 different species of chipmunks but are the only one in the eastern United States, which makes identification easier. They are much smaller than all

eastern squirrel species and can be distinguished by their reddish-brown fur, light stripes over their eyes, and five dark brown stipes contrasting with lighter stripes along its back. They have a long, dark tail and lighter fur on their underparts. They are most common in forests and woodlands, but also thrive in human-dominated ecosystems. They eat roots, seeds, insects, and wild grasses.

