



Animal Identification Guide

Distinctive Species:

White Tailed Deer

White tail deer have a tan to reddish-brown coat in the summer and slightly duller color variations during the winter. Males possess antlers during the summer months which are shed during the winter. As the name suggests, white tailed deer have brown tails with a white underside, and often white underbellies. Fawns have reddish coats, and while they are still young have white spots along their backs and sides. They are common in forests; especially ones that have open fields or brush lands, as they feed predominantly on grasses and other vegetation. White-tailed deer are found almost anywhere in the United States.



Northern Raccoon

Northern raccoons are common almost anywhere in the United States. Their most obvious features are their ringed tails, white faces, and 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 also been documented. They are well known as 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

Virginia opossums, a predominantly nocturnal scavenging species native to the southern United States, sport a white head and predominant long, furless pink tail. These opossums have scruffy looking gray body fur, as well as 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 as well. These mammals are the only marsupials found in North America.



American Black Bear

Black bears are one of the smaller species of bear and live in the northern parts of North America. However, their population stretches down along the Appalachian mountain chain, where they live in woodlands and swamps. As their name suggest, black bears are most commonly dark brown or black, although variations of brown or tan are not unknown. Most black bears have lighter colored muzzles and/or white patches on their chest. American black bears are omnivores, although predominantly eat plant matter and scavenge food. Bears are very curious of camera-traps and bear-induced damage to cameras is possible.



Eastern Cottontail

The eastern cottontail rabbit is the most common cottontail rabbit in the United States. Their range covers the East Coast to the Midwest, and they live in a variety of habitats stretching from mountain woodlands to coastal meadows, where they eat a variety of grasses and other vegetation. They can be distinguished from other rabbits by their lack of black fringe or markings on their ears and faces that other species of rabbits possess. Eastern cottontails, however, may have white patches or markings on their face and around their eyes. They have dull brown or grayish fur and white underbellies. They are most commonly seen at night, and can run up to speeds of eighteen miles and hour.



Wild Turkey

Wild turkeys, well known for their distinctive gobbling sound 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 most commonly live in mature forests. At night, wild turkeys fly up into the trees as a flock to roost among the branches.



Woodchuck

Woodchucks, often called groundhogs, are a medium sized rodents 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 overall broad and flat.

Woodchucks are excellent diggers; they dig both simple and complex burrow systems, the depth and length depending on the type of soil. Most burrows are 25 to 30 feet long and from two to five feet deep, with at least two entrances.



Eastern Chipmunk

Eastern chipmunks are one of 22 different species of chipmunks, which are members of the squirrel family. Eastern chipmunks are the only species of chipmunk in the Eastern United States, which makes identification easier. Their distinctive striped brown and white coat, as well as their long, dark tail distinguishes them. Eastern chipmunks are usually a pale brown to chestnut color, with darker fur around their stripes and a russet rump. They are most common in forests and woodlands, but also thrive in human-dominated ecosystems. They eat roots, seeds, insects, and wild grasses.



Weasel-Like Animals:

Short-tailed Weasel

This weasel has a dark tail top and typically white feet. They are smaller than the long-tailed weasel and have a relatively shorter tail dark-tipped tail but like their long-tailed counterparts, they are brown in the summer and white in the winter. These weasels are found typically in northern states and Canada but can make it as far south as Maryland. They are nocturnal hunters preying on small mammals. Short-tailed weasels are commonly known as Ermines.



Long-tailed Weasel

This is the most widely distributed weasel in the United States; their range extends over most of the country. This weasel is larger than the short-tailed weasel with a relatively longer, dark-tipped tail often having white on their front and/or back legs. Like the short-tailed weasel, in the northern part of their range they will molt to white in the winter. Long-tailed weasels primarily feed on rodents although they are opportunistic predators and will take birds, cottontails, and reptiles if available. Their long slender shape enables them to enter the burrow of their prey.



American Mink

American minks are dark brown, semi-aquatic weasels that are common near waterways in North America, excluding the Southwest and Western portions of the United States. A mainly nocturnal species, American minks are sleek, thick-furred mammals with a long tail and neck. They have webbed toes for swimming on their short, stocky hind legs. American minks usually have small patches of white on their chin or throat, but are otherwise a solid dark color. They eat a wide range of foods, including but not limited to fish, eggs, invertebrate, and sea birds. Although similar to otters, minks can be distinguished by their long, non-tapering tails (otters have shorter, flatter ones).



Northern River Otter

Northern river otters are large, semi-aquatic mammals that possess a thick brown coat with silvery to white chins and throats. Unlike the American mink and sea otter, the river otter has a long, thick tail which tapers into a point at the tip. They are larger than both as well, and have webbed toes on all four feet. They are most often seen at dusk or dawn around marshy or unpolluted marine habitats, and their diet consists mainly of marine invertebrates and fish, as well as frogs and crayfish. River otters are excellent swimmers, but they can run on land as well; they are well known as being a generally a playful species.



Dog-Like Animals:

Red Fox

Red foxes are medium-sized predators that feed on rodents, rabbits, birds and other small game. Although they are called “red” foxes, their fur can be red, silver, gray or black. Red foxes have a distinctive white tail tip, black legs and black ear tips which distinguish them from gray foxes. Red foxes are found throughout Canada and most of the United States where they prefer landscapes with a mixture of open fields and brushy or forested areas. These foxes are thought to have declined in the east due to coyote expansion.



Gray Fox

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



Coyote

The coyote is a large, pack-living carnivore common throughout Canada, the United States and Mexico. Coyotes have a very varied diet consisting of fruits and small to medium-sized prey. Their coloration is varied, though typically gray, black or reddish-brown with pale throat and belly. They can be distinguished from the foxes due to their larger size, longer limbs, longer ears and longer snouts. Coyotes have expanded their range following the persecution of gray wolves in the United States and are common in all types of natural habitats.



Squirrels

Eastern Gray Squirrel

The eastern gray squirrel is the most commonly seen mammal in the eastern United States. It is a hoarder that gathers food such as nuts and berries and hides them in many small caches to go back and eat later. The gray squirrel has a mostly gray back that may have a hint of red-brown, a white belly, and a large bushy tail. They are usually half the size of fox squirrels with a less colorful coat and larger than the flying squirrel with a bushier tail and lack of a wing membrane. The gray squirrel usually builds leaf nests in hardwood trees and is common in forested and urban areas.



Eastern Fox Squirrel

The eastern fox squirrel is the largest species of squirrel native to North America. They eat a variety of foods including tree seeds, fruits, grains, insects, birds' eggs, lizards, and small snakes. They come in a variety of colors from black to brown to rusty-gray. They have a more bushy tail than eastern gray squirrels and are usually twice their size. They are also much larger than the southern flying squirrel with a bushier tail and lack of a wing membrane. They often have distinguishing black or white markings on their faces. Fox squirrels prefer habitats with an open understory.



Southern Flying Squirrel

The southern 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 usually includes fungi, nuts, fruits, and bird eggs. The flying squirrel is smaller than the gray and fox squirrel, has a less bushy tail, and a wing membrane with a blackish edge. The flying squirrel is commonly found in hardwood forests in eastern North America.



Skunks:

Striped Skunk

The striped skunk is the larger of the two species of skunk found in the Southeastern United States. It is usually marked with a pair of stripes running down its back and join together to form a V at the back of the neck. They are larger and have stripes rather than spots going down their back that distinguishes them from the spotted skunk. They are nocturnal hunters that eat insects and small vertebrates in a variety of habitats. They will typically raise their tail and stomp their front feet before spraying a liquid with a very strong smell.



Eastern Spotted Skunk

The spotted skunk is the smaller of the two species of skunk found in Southeastern United States. They have thin white spots and a white tip to a mostly black tail that distinguishes them from the striped skunk. This skunk is rare in the Southeast, choosing to live in habitats with extensive cover. They hunt insects, mice and other small animals. The spotted skunk may perform a typical handstand before spraying a liquid with a very strong smell.



Cat-Like Animals:

Bobcat

Bobcats typically have a yellowish to reddish brown coat marked with dark streaks and spots and a very short tail. Their ears are short and have black tufts of fur sticking out from the tips. They primarily hunt rabbits and other small animals at night and are found throughout almost all of 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

Domestic cats are an invasive species introduced to the wild by pet owners. They feed on a variety of native wildlife including birds and small mammals. They are about half the size of bobcats, have long tail and a variety of coat colorations.

