

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

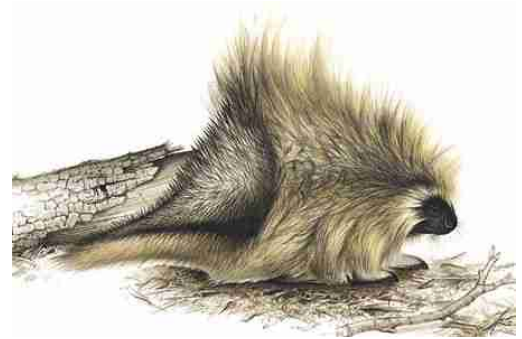
North American Porcupine

(*Erethizon dorsatum*)

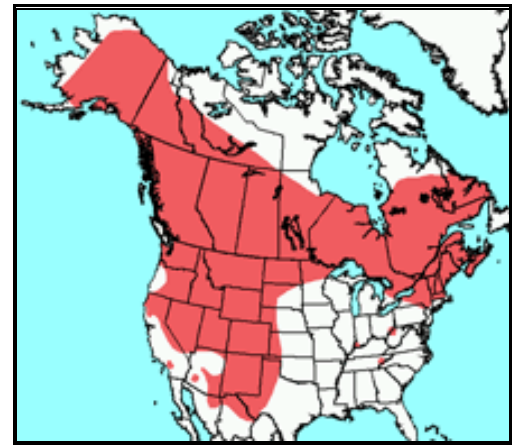
ORDER: Rodentia

FAMILY: Erethizodontidae

North American Porcupines are large, slow-moving, tree-climbing rodents, protected from predators by their formidable quills. In winter, they eat the bark, phloem, and cambium of trees, particularly conifers. In spring and summer, they mostly forage on the ground, feeding on grasses, sedges, acorns, and flowers. They readily consume crops or gnaw on automobile tires, so are sometimes regarded as pests. Porcupine young are exceptionally well developed at birth. Their eyes are open and they have teeth and even quills, which are soft at birth but harden within a few hours. Within a week, they can feed on their own. Few predators even try to kill Porcupines with any regularity, except one, the fisher. Fishers attack Porcupines from the front, grabbing them by the face, thus avoiding the quills. Porcupines do not throw their quills – which are modified hairs – but the quills pull loose from the Porcupine when they are stuck into an adversary, and they have barbed tips, so they are not easily removed.



Credit: painting by Todd Zalewski from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



Also known as:

Porc-epic, Hedgehog, Quillpig, Quiller

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are heavier than females.

Length:

Average: 772 mm

Range: 600–1,300 mm

Weight:

Range: 3.5–18 kg

FIELD NOTES

DATE: _____ LOCATION: _____

