

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Northern River Otter

(*Lontra canadensis* (*Lutra canadensis*))

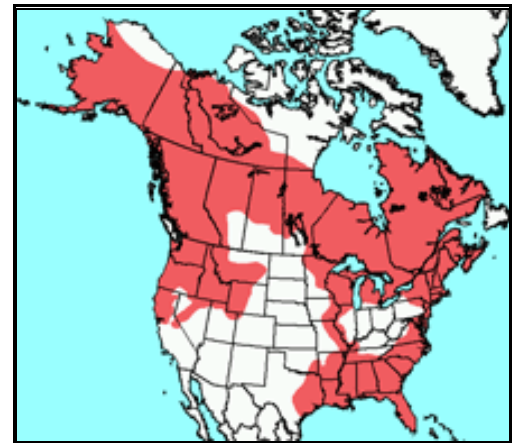
ORDER: Carnivora

FAMILY: Mustelidae

River Otters can be thought of – and in a very real sense are – semi-aquatic weasels. Like fishers, martens, and mink, they have long, slender bodies, short limbs, and a short face, plus a set of adaptations for their aquatic lifestyle: an oily, waterproof coat, webbed toes, and small external ears. River Otters are good swimmers and divers, able to stay underwater for up to eight minutes. They feed on crayfish, crabs, fish, birds, small mammals, and some aquatic plants. They once lived in streams, rivers, lakes, swamps, and coastal areas throughout Canada and the United States. Now they are gone from the central and eastern United States, and extinct or rare in Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and West Virginia. Scientific studies have shown them to be sensitive to pollution. Still these animals are commercially harvested: 20,000 – 30,000 are taken annually for their lustrous fur.



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



Also known as:

River Otter, Common Otter

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are larger than females.

Length:

Range: 889–1,300 mm

Weight:

Range: 5–14 kg

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Ermine

(*Mustela erminea*)

ORDER: Carnivora

FAMILY: Mustelidae

Ermine are highly adaptable predators, easily invading small burrows to feed on voles, mice, and young rabbits. They also eat earthworms, frogs, and squirrels, climbing trees and swimming if necessary.

Mother Ermine teach their young to hunt. Litters of 4–9 young are born in nests that are often located in rodent burrows. The newborns are blind and helpless, but in six weeks are almost adult-size. In the summer, the Ermine's coat is brown, but in the winter it is pure white except for the tip of the tail, which stays black. Ermine population density tends to fluctuate as rodent populations fluctuate.



Mustela erminea – summer coat depicted here; winter coat is white except for black tail tip

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

Also known as:

Short-tailed Weasel, Stoat

Sexual Dimorphism:

Males are approximately twice the size of females.

Length:

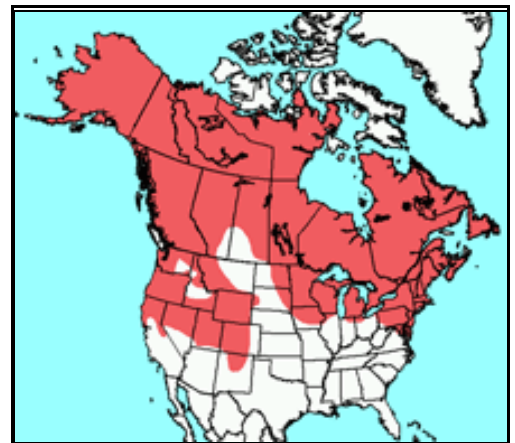
Average: 272 mm males; 240 mm females

Range: 219–343 mm males; 190–292 mm females

Weight:

Average: 80 g males; 54 g females

Range: 67–116 g males; 25–80 g females



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Long-tailed Weasel
(*Mustela frenata*)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mustelidae

Long-tailed Weasels are voracious predators, foraging day and night for small vertebrates, and scavenging for carrion when necessary. In captivity, adults can consume an amount equal to one-third their own body weight in 24 hours. In the wild they may store food in a burrow or near a kill site. They are solitary except for the July–August breeding season. Both males and females maintain territories, marking them with chemical secretions from anal glands. Litters usually comprise 4–5 pups, born in a den. In 12 weeks they reach full adult body weight and begin hunting for food, pursuing mates, and establishing territories. Foxes, raptors, Coyotes, domestic dogs and cats, and rattlesnakes all prey on Long-tailed Weasels, and although they can live in a variety of habitats, population densities are low. In some locations they are endangered, and in others, considered threatened or species of concern.

Also known as:
Bridled Weasel

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Range: 330–420 mm males; 280–350 mm females

Weight:
Range: 160–450 g males; 80–250 g females



Mustela frenata – winter coat, left; summer coat, center; "Bridled Weasel", right
Credit: painting by Consie Powell from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



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Black-footed Ferret
(*Mustela nigripes*)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mustelidae

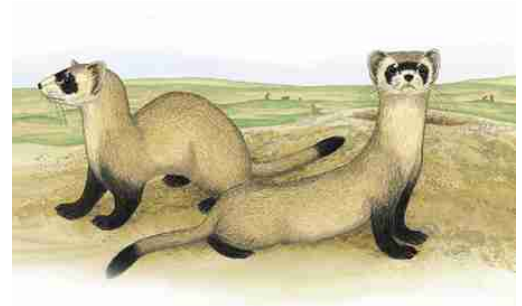
Conservation Status: Extinct in the Wild.

Once widespread in the grasslands and western basins of North America, by 1987 Black-footed Ferrets were thought to be extinct in the wild. Captive animals were bred in an effort to save the species, and in 1991, some were reintroduced in Montana, South Dakota, and Wyoming. The Ferrets depend on prairie dogs, living in their tunnels and eating them, and the young are born in prairie dog tunnels. Black-footed Ferrets are mostly nocturnal and seldom seen. The best chance of seeing them is in mid- to late summer, after the young begin to be active aboveground.

Also known as:
Ferret

Length:
Average: 534 mm males; 501 mm females
Range: 490–600 mm males; 479–518 mm females

Weight:
Average: 1,034 g males; 703 g females
Range: 915–1,034 g males; 645–850 g females



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



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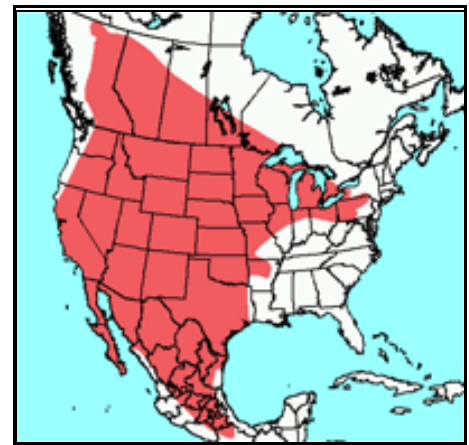
American Badger
(*Taxidea taxus*)

ORDER: Carnivora
FAMILY: Mustelidae

Badgers look like short, shaggy, medium-sized dogs. They are powerful diggers. One, taken to a football game as a mascot, escaped and dug its way under the field. They dig after and feed on ground squirrels and pocket gophers, and also eat toads, frogs, birds, snakes, insects and insect grubs, wasps, bees, and worms. They sleep through most of the winter in a den, spending about 29 hours at a time in a state of torpor, rousing briefly, and then sleeping again. In torpor, which is not true hibernation, the Badger's heartbeat slows to about half the normal rate and its temperature drops. Humans are the Badgers' worst enemy, trapping and poisoning them, but they are now protected in some states and provinces.



Taxidea taxus – typical coat pattern, right; southwestern variant with longer dorsal stripe, left
Credit: painting by Consie Powell from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



Also known as:
North American Badger, Tlalcoyote, or Blaireau

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Range: 600–790 mm

Weight:
Range: up to 12 kg in the wild, 18 kg in captivity

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