



FURBEARERS OF CANADA



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Fur Council of Canada
and the
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Trade Federation.

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Canada is blessed with an abundance of natural resources including forests, lakes and rivers, minerals, oil and gas, and many species of wildlife. This book will give you information on fifteen of Canada's furbearing animals.

From the beginning of time, humans have relied on animals for fur, leather, meat and other valuable products. For several hundred years it was the search for furs that drove the settlement of Canada. During this time over-harvesting threatened some species populations. However, since the 1930s scientific study has led to government regulations and improved trapping practices that ensure trapping (for fur, habitat protection or other purposes) is conducted to keep wildlife populations stable and healthy. Trappers take only part of the surplus that nature produces each year. Endangered species are never used. Today's fur trade is, in fact, an excellent example of the sustainable use of renewable resources, a principle shared with conservation groups around the world.



The greatest threat to furbearers and other wildlife is the loss of habitat as our cities grow and as more land is needed for agriculture, forestry, mining or other uses. Despite these challenges, most furbearer populations are healthy across North America. Some species (raccoon, skunk, fox and coyote) even share our towns and cities. The abundance of North American furbearers shows the caring and commitment of today's trappers, conservation groups and government wildlife agencies.



Over 70,000 people are involved in the Canadian fur trade, including some 60,000 First Nations and non-native trappers. These people and their families rely on furbearer animals for food, clothing and income. Since they want the animals to be there for future generations, they work with conservation in mind. It is thanks to them that we know as much as we do about this wildlife.

Trapping occurs in all parts of Canada (and around the world) for many reasons: to protect natural habitat, farmland, roads and other property (for example, from muskrat burrowing or beaver flooding), for disease control (for example, rabies in raccoons and foxes), to protect endangered species from overly abundant predator populations, for reintroducing species to their historical territories, for conservation research, as well as for food and furs.

Trapping is highly regulated in Canada to ensure long-term conservation of furbearer populations. Canadian trappers also use methods that meet the highest animal welfare standards in the world. Our federal, provincial and territorial governments all support trapping as a responsible wildlife management tool and an important cultural and economic activity for people living in rural and remote regions across Canada.

We hope this booklet will help you to better understand and appreciate the Furbearers of Canada. It contains the knowledge of those people who work closest to the land.

Rob Cahill
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BEAVER

(*Castor canadensis*)

Rodent Family/**Herbivore***



NPS Photos



Beavers are **semi-aquatic** and the world's second largest rodents.

They are best known for their natural trait of building dams in rivers and streams, and building their homes (known as beaver lodges) in the resulting pond. Beavers cause habitat changes in two ways; by

cutting down trees and by construction of the dam. The dam is built from sticks and branches that are dragged to the site, piled and interwoven, and sealed with mud and stones. The beaver cuts down an average of 216 trees a year. It can chop down trees up to 40 cm in diameter. This **instinctive** activity happens wherever beavers are motivated to build by the sound of running water.



Beavers mate for life and only take another mate if the first dies. Beaver colonies contain from 2 to 12 members, with one breeding pair and a number of **yearlings** and **kits**. Young may leave the family colony by age one, or may be gradually forced out by the parent pair, if they have not left by the age of two.

Special features: The beaver's tail has important uses both in the water and on land. In the water, the animal uses its tail as a 4-way rudder. On land, the tail supports the beaver when it is sitting or standing upright and is a counterbalance when the animal is carrying materials with its front paws. When they sense danger, beavers slap the water with their tails, making a noise like a pistol shot. This danger warning to other beavers may also serve to drive away potential predators.

Since beaver's teeth are constantly growing, they gnaw on the bark of trees to keep their teeth worn down and grind their teeth to keep them sharp.

Beavers can stay submerged for up to 15 minutes. They have transparent eyelids that cover their eyes when they go under water. This helps them to see well and

protects their eyeballs from particles suspended in the water. Their ears and noses have valves that stop water from entering when they submerge. A flap closes behind their front teeth preventing water from going into their mouth when they chew sticks underwater.

Adults weigh between 18 and 22 kg and, including its 30 cm tail, a large beaver may measure 1.3 metres long.

Beavers have two oil **glands** on their lower bellies that produce a waterproof oil. Beavers comb this into their fur using a specialized split toenail on their webbed hind feet. They also have two castor **glands** which produce a scent that beavers deposit on **scent mounds** to mark territorial boundaries.

Food: Bark of trembling aspen tree (white poplar), willows, birch and black poplar, roots, pond lilies and other aquatic plants.

Denning: Beavers inhabit lodges or houses constructed from mud and sticks. These rise above the water either in the centre of the ponds or against the banks of waterways. Lodges provide protection from predators and keep the colony warm in winter. They have underwater entrances and an unmuddied spot directly on top, which serves as an air vent. During winter, beaver activity is restricted to traveling under the ice between the lodge and their underwater food **cache**.



Beavers may spend as long as 6 months under the ice.

Predators: The beaver's major predators are wolves. Bears, wolverines, lynx and coyotes will also occasionally prey.

*Words in bold are explained in the Glossary on page 32.

BEAVER

(*Castor canadensis*)

Rodent Family/Herbivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

20 months

Average life span:

4 to 5 years

Mating:

January/March

Young born:

May/June

Gestation:

103 to 107 days

1 litter a year/Average 3 or 4 kits

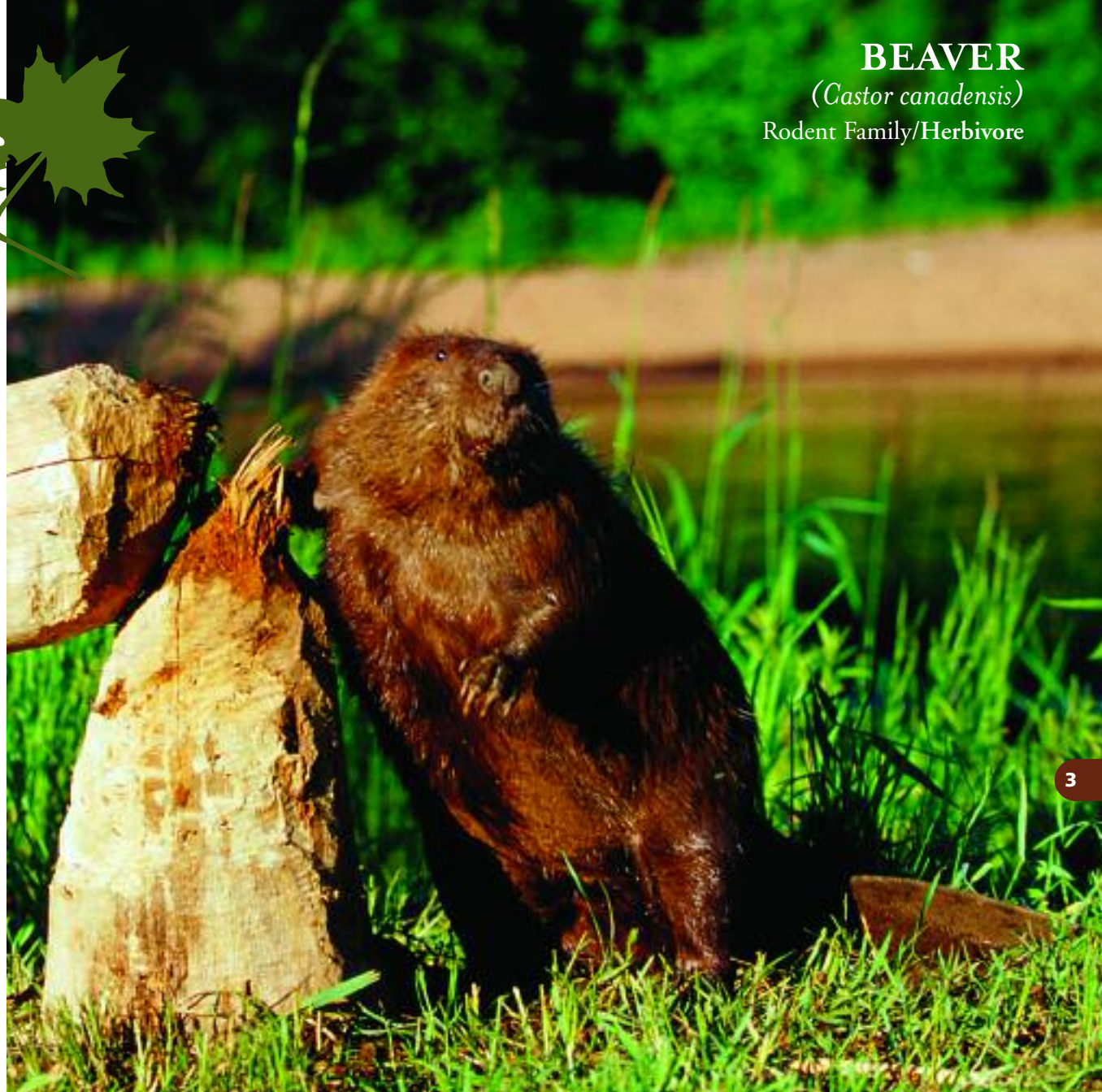
Habitat:

Slow, winding streams and small lakes with soft banks where willows, aspen and other **deciduous** trees grow.

Management Issues:

Beaver dams can cause dangerous flooding damage to roads, railways, homes, and agricultural lands.

Overabundant populations increase the risk of water-borne diseases such as **Giardia**. Beavers can both create and destroy habitat important for certain species at risk.



BLACK BEAR

(*Ursus americanus*)

Ursidae Family/Omnivore



NPS Photo



Black bears are only found in North America and while they are generally black, in certain regions they are brown, red, golden or white in colour. They inhabit all of their historical ranges except where large cities exist. Black bears have adapted very well to a human altered landscape. They are increasingly found within recreation areas, towns and suburban areas attracted by food and garbage.



Black bears are solitary animals except during mating season.

Cubs are born hairless, measure 15 to 20 cm in length and weigh 0.2 to 0.4 kg at birth – about one two-hundredths of their mother's weight. They begin leaving the den at spring thaw. Normally, young bears remain with their mother (called a sow) until they are 16 to 17 months old. Females are usually full-grown by the age of five, while some males may continue to grow even after the age of seven.

Special features: Black bears are bulky, thickset mammals that often appear much heavier than they really are. They have small eyes, rounded ears, a long snout, a short tail, and shaggy hair. Adult males typically weigh about 135 kg, although the largest on record weighed over 360 kg. Females are much smaller than males, averaging 70 kg. Standing up on its hind feet, a black bear can be up to 7 feet tall.

The long-distance eyesight of the black bear is relatively poor, but its senses of hearing and smell are well developed. The lips of the black bear, unlike those of other animals, are free from the gums and the bear can use them with amazing dexterity. This adaptation and a long manipulative tongue help the bear to pick small berries and insects.

Each paw has five long curved claws, which the bear cannot retract. These are very strong and are used for digging and tearing out roots, stumps, and old logs when searching for food. Black bears are powerful swimmers, excellent climbers and can run up to speeds of 55km/hr. Although black bears can stand and walk on their hind legs normally they walk on all fours.

Black bears eat both plants and animals and will eat almost anything available. They are primarily **foragers** but will also hunt animals.

Bears are not true hibernators since they remain somewhat alert during winter months; however, they do not eat or eliminate waste, and survive entirely on their stored fat. During the winter they may lose up to 30 percent of their pre-denning weight. Most bears continue to lose weight until summer when quantities of berries start to become available.

Food: Emerging plant shoots, leaves and bark, fruits, berries and nuts, crawling and flying insects and larvae, **carrion**, honey, fish, small mammals. Occasionally, birds, bear **cubs**, newborn moose, caribou or elk calves or deer fawns.



NPS Photo

Black bears are fond of eating rotting garbage.

Denning: Black bears spend winters in hollowed-out dens in tree cavities, under logs or rocks, in hillside holes or caves, in **culverts** or in shallow depressions. Dens are normally not reused from one year to the next.

Predators: Predators include older bears and occasionally wolves, coyotes, cougars and lynx.

BLACK BEAR

(*Ursus americanus*)

Ursidae Family/Omnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces/Territories except
Prince Edward Island and
southern Saskatchewan/
Southern Alberta.

Maturity:

3 to 5 years

Average life span:

10 years

Mating:

Mid-June to mid-July

Young born:

Mid-January to early February

Gestation:

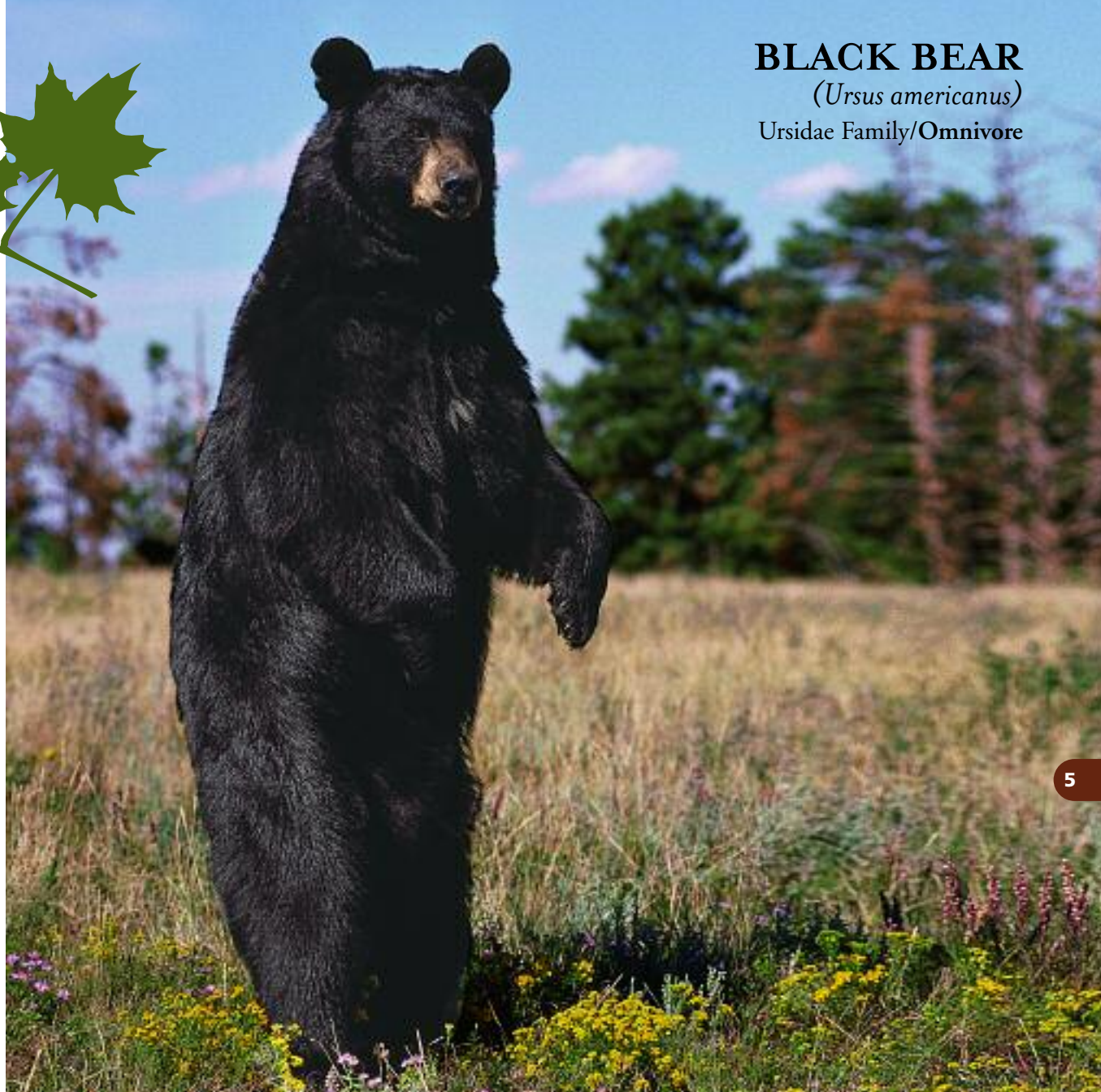
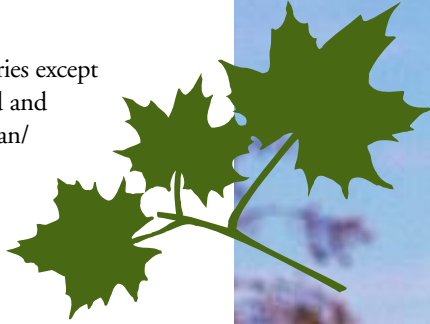
210 to 240 days due to **delayed**
implantation (active **gestation** 47 days,)
1 litter every two years/Average 2 to 3 cubs

Habitat:

Forests and dense bush, burned areas,
swamps, tidelands, and grasslands.

Management Issues:

Adaptation to people plus habitat
encroachment by humans has increased
human-bear conflicts. While rare, attacks
happen when a black bear has lost its fear
of humans. Livestock **predations** and
raids on bee hives and vegetable and
fruit crops can be significant problems.
Black bears can do extensive forest
destruction by debarking and killing trees.



BOBCAT

(*Lynx rufus*)

Cat Family/Carnivore



Bobcats are found only in North America, where it is the most common wildcat. It gets its name from its stubby, “bobbed,” tail.

Bobcats are the smallest species of lynx but are not found as far north because they don’t have the large, snowshoe-like footpads, which give the lynx mobility in deep snow.



Bobcats are territorial solitary animals except during mating season. They follow established hunting routes, but will wander away to follow prey. Newborns weigh 280–340 g and are about 25 cm in length. They open their eyes within 3 to 10 days after birth, and are **weaned** by about 10 weeks of age. The female is protective of her young, but may leave them if humans disturb the den. **Kits** stay with the mother for 8-12 months.

Special features: Bobcats are bigger than a house cat and smaller than a lynx. Adult males weigh between 8 and 16 kg while adult females average around 9 kg.

Even though they resemble the lynx, the bobcat has several features, which distinguish them: They have shorter legs and their smaller feet have less hair than lynx. Bobcat’s ears are smaller and their ear tufts and cheek **ruff** are shorter. Their coat is more patterned and varied in colour and their tails lack the full black tip like that of the lynx.

The bobcat has sharp hearing and vision, and a good sense of smell. It has a powerful jaw and long, pointed canine teeth. They can often kill their prey in one bite.

The bobcat is an excellent climber, and will swim when it needs to, but will normally avoid water. Bobcats will climb trees to escape from predators or to

chase prey but don’t usually spend much time in trees. They are powerful fighters and can leap up to 3 metres.



Bobcats hunt in various habitats. They catch fish and will even pull down and kill weakened deer in deep snow.

Food: Hares, rabbits, squirrels, rodents, mink, skunks, foxes, muskrats, birds and their eggs, snakes, fish, **crustaceans** and insects. Bobcats will also prey on deer and antelope.

Denning: If a rocky crevice or small cave is not available, it will den in a dense thicket of brush or sometimes choose a hollow in a log or a tree.

Predators: Cougars and wolves. Kittens are preyed upon by foxes, coyotes, adult male bobcats, large owls and hawks.

BOBCAT

(*Lynx rufus*)

Cat Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All of southern Canada

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

6 to 8 years

Mating:

February and March

Young born:

April and May

Gestation:

60 to 70 days

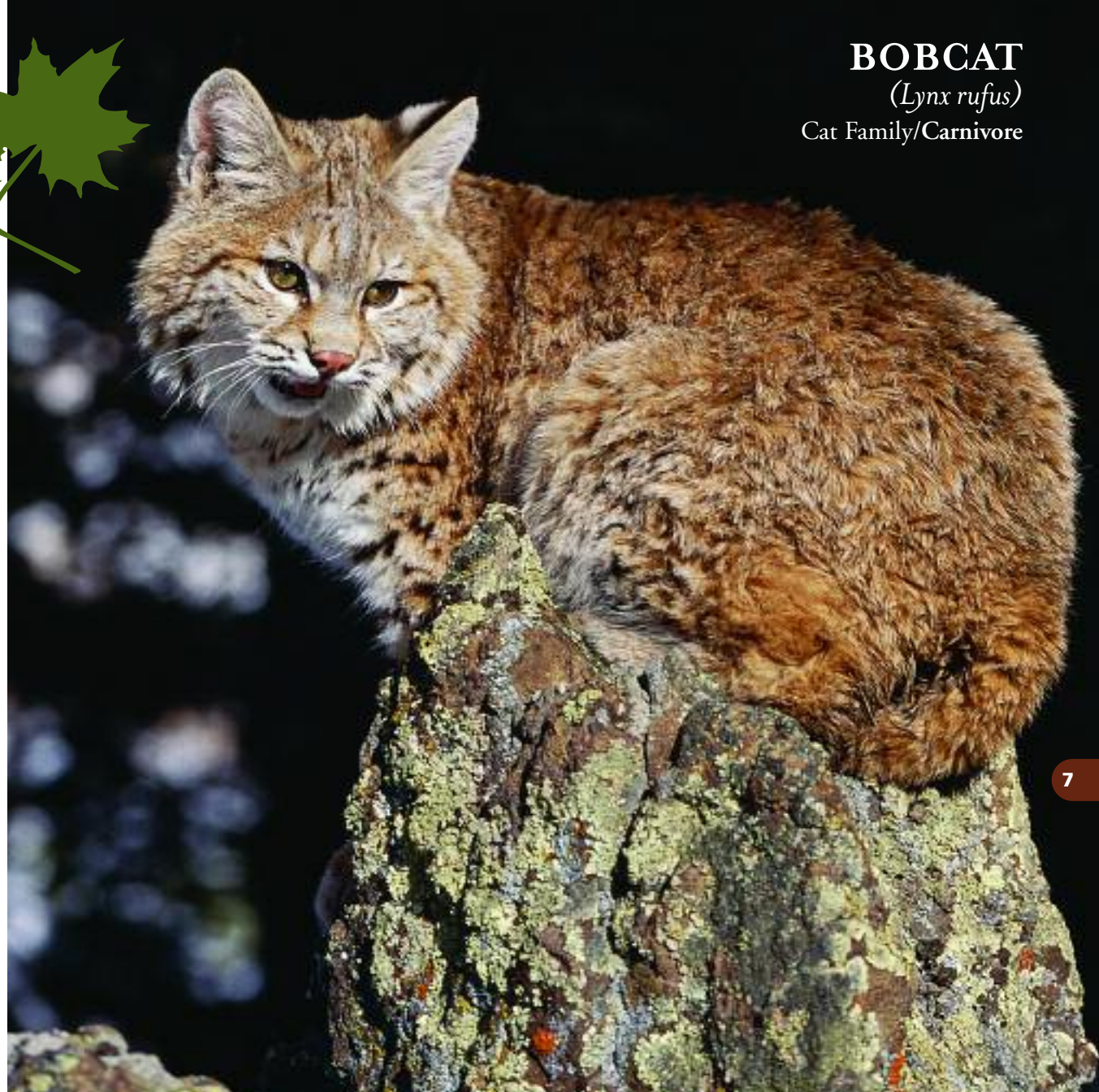
1 litter a year/Average 2 to 4 kits

Habitat:

Rocky scrubland and forests including swamps, farmlands, urban edges and arid lands.

Management Issues:

Bobcats sometimes prey on chickens, pigs, sheep, calves and pets.



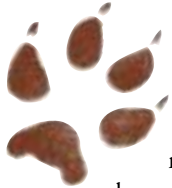
COYOTE

(*Canis latrans*)

Canid Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



Their scientific name means 'barking dog' since the coyote's best-known trait is its yipping and howling, most often at dusk or night.

At the turn of the twentieth century, coyotes began a dramatic range expansion from the western prairies. They have now spread throughout most of Canada.



Coyotes live in **packs** but are not as unified as wolf **packs**, and members will readily **disperse** and regroup. Although the coyote usually hunts alone or with a mate, more than two animals may unite to capture larger prey.

In late summer and early fall, families hunt as a group.

Pups weigh approximately 250 grams at birth. The eyes open and ears become erect after 10 days. At 21-28 days, the young begin to emerge from the den and by 35 days they are fully **weaned**. Both parents feed the young pups with **regurgitated** food. Male pups will **disperse** between 6 and 9 months. Females may remain with the parents and form the basis of the **pack**.

Special features: Slimmer and smaller than the wolf, the male coyote weighs from 9 to 23 kg, with an overall length of 120 to 150 cm (including a 30 to 40 cm tail). The female is about 20 percent smaller. Adult coyotes usually run with their tails pointed downward, unlike wolves, which run with their tails straight out.

The coyote's long fur varies from greyish brown to yellowish grey and the back has guard hairs that form a black dorsal stripe and a dark cross over the shoulders. The ears are large in relation to the head.

They have well-developed senses of hearing and smell. Coyotes can run at speeds of 40 to 50 km/h. They are strong swimmers and can leap more than 4 metres.



NPS Photo

Coyotes can run up to 64 km an hour for short distances, which is faster than a wolf.

Food: Small mammals, such as groundhogs, hares, rabbits, ground squirrels, mice and other rodents; birds; snakes; deer; large insects and other large **invertebrates**. Coyotes will consume large amounts of **carrion** and vegetation when available.

Denning: The coyote uses a den for the birth and early care of its pups. Dens usually consists of a **burrow** in the soil found in concealed spots on brush-covered slopes, steep banks and rocky ledges, as well as under stumps, dry **culverts** and empty buildings. Like the fox, coyotes prefer to renovate the abandoned dens of other species, such as badger and skunk.

Predators: Wolves, cougars, bears and golden eagles and occasionally lynx.

COYOTE

(*Canis latrans*)

Canid Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

4 to 8 years

Mating:

February and March

Young born:

April and May

Gestation:

60 to 63 days

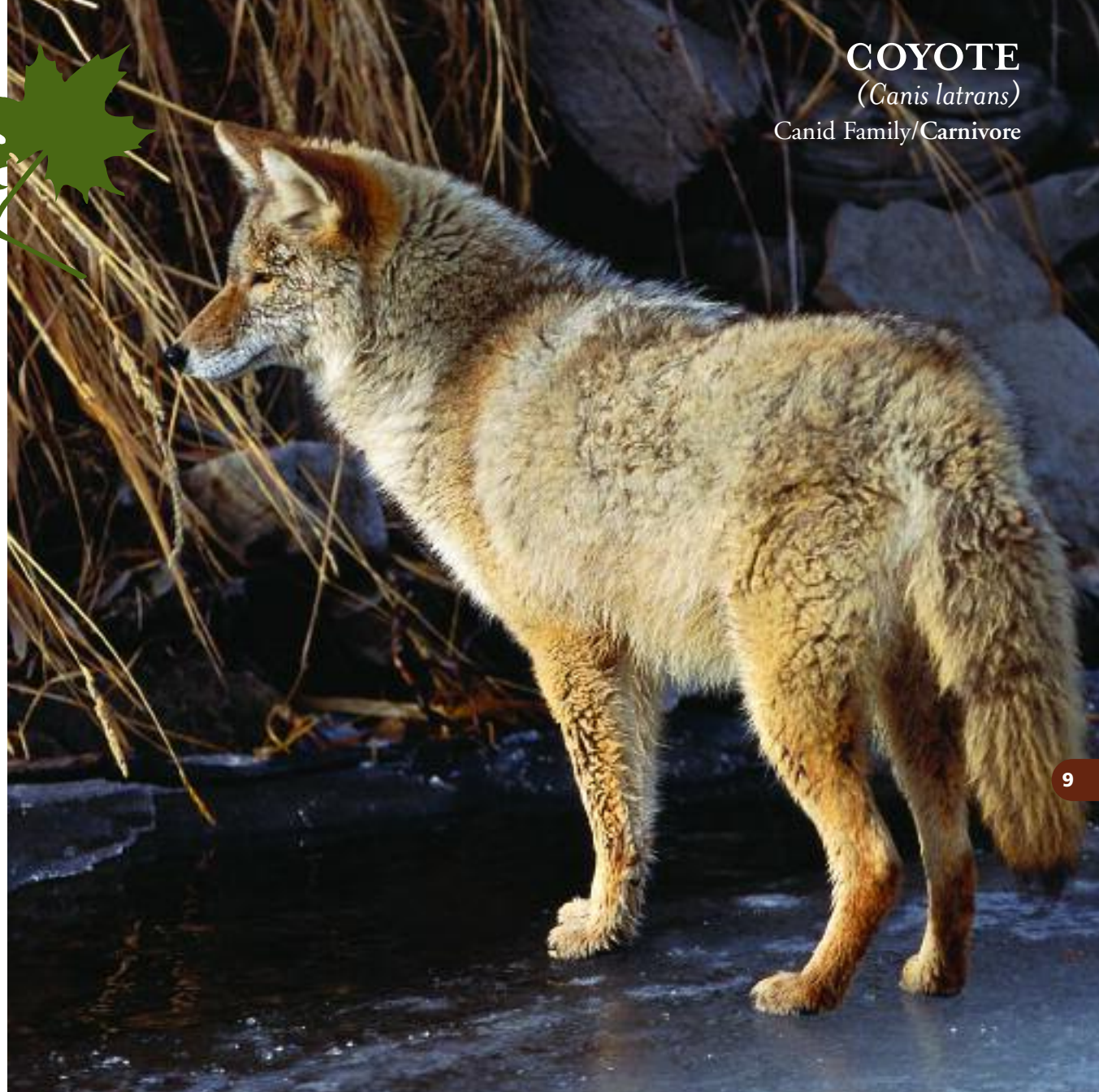
1 litter a year/Average 6 pups

Habitat:

Open or semi-wooded habitats on farmlands, swamplands, grasslands and urban areas.

Management Issues:

Coyotes are clever predators that often prey on livestock, poultry and pets. Attacks on humans are uncommon. Coydog **hybrids** are a more serious threat because they have the coyote's predatory nature and the dog's lack of timidity toward humans. Coyotes carry transmittable diseases and parasites.



FISHER

(*Martes pennanti*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



Fishers are found only in North America and despite its name seldom eats fish. They are one of the few predators of porcupines. To avoid the quills, the fisher attacks the face and head and then eats the porcupine by flipping the dead animal over.



As with most other types of weasels, adult fishers are fierce fighters and are solitary except during mating season. Fishers are secretive and rarely seen but are known for one of their calls, which can sound like a child screaming.

Newborns weigh about 40 grams and have very little fur. Their eyes open at seven weeks of age. Kits begin to be weaned at 8 to 10 weeks and remain in the den for about three months. By the time they are four months old they are fully weaned and able to hunt for themselves. They leave the female between 5 to 8 months of age.

Special features: Fishers have brown coats with a black tail and legs. Their slender body allows them to follow prey into hollow trees or burrows in the ground. They have short legs, small rounded ears and long bushy tails. The adult male weighs 3.6 to 5.4 kg and measures 90 to 120 cm including the tail. Females are generally 10 to 25 percent smaller.

The fisher has long sharp teeth and five toes with retractable claws. Large padded paws allow it to walk on top of snow. The fisher is agile in trees but travels mainly on the ground. Like squirrels, fishers can rotate their hind paws 180 degrees, allowing them to grasp limbs and walk or run down trees head first.

Food: Snowshoe hares, small rodents, squirrels, birds, porcupines, **carrion**, birds' eggs, insects, reptiles, **amphibians** and various fruits and seeds.

Denning: Tree hollows, under logs or in rocky crevices, old porcupine dens and cavities in the snow.

Predators: Young fishers fall prey to cougars, lynx, bobcats, wolverines, other fishers, red fox, hawks and eagles. Adult fishers are generally safe from **predation**.



Fishers are well known for preying on porcupines.



Cougars are one of the fisher's predators.

FISHER

(*Martes pennanti*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories except P.E.I. and Newfoundland. Rare in N.W.T., Nunavut, Yukon and Northern B.C.

Maturity:

1 to 2 years

Average life span:

4 to 5 years

Mating:

Late February to May

Young born:

February to May

Gestation:

327 to 358 days due to **delayed implantation** (active gestation 30 days)
1 litter a year/Average 3 kits

Habitat:

Fishers will live in a variety of forested areas as long as there is sufficient prey and denning/resting sites. They avoid open areas and prefer dense forests.

Management Issues:


Fishers are aggressive hunters and outcompete their smaller weasel cousins for available food supplies. They help control porcupine populations. When food sources become scarce, they will prey on small domestic animals and poultry.




LYNX

(*Lynx canadensis*)

Cat Family/Carnivore



The Canadian lynx is a solitary and territorial cat found in the northern United States, Canada and Alaska. Because it is secretive and mostly active at night, it is rarely seen. They may stalk a person for hours, but are not known to attack. After breeding, the male lynx leaves the female.



Newborns weigh about 280 grams and are 25 cm in length. Born with a spotted fur coat, these spots disappear as they get older. Newborns open their eyes by 10 days of age and are **weaned** at 2 months. At about three months of age, the female begins teaching the young to capture mice.

Once their hunting skills improve, they will prey mainly on snowshoe hares. **Kits** leave the female between 6 to 9 months of age.

Special features: Lynx have a sturdy body, long, muscular legs and large feet with furry footpads that keep their feet warm and act like snowshoes on deep snow. Their black-tipped tail is very short, their large ears are triangular and they have long tufts of hair on the ear tips and cheeks. Their **mottled** tawny-grey coat is much shorter in summer than the winter coat.

The lynx stands taller at the shoulder than its relative the bobcat and has longer ear tufts, larger feet and a tail with a full black tip. The weight of an adult lynx averages 7.7 kg, and may range from 5.0 to 15.9 kg. They are between 90 to 110 cm in length.

Lynx are powerful fighters, excellent climbers and good swimmers but are not fast runners except for short distances. They have excellent sight and hearing.

Food: Snowshoe hare. Sometimes birds, rodents, squirrels, rabbits, skunks, porcupines, eggs and fish, weakened deer and other large **ungulates, carrion.**



Each lynx can eat up to 170 snowshoe hares in one year. Their survival depends on a good supply for them to hunt.

Denning: Dens are made under rock ledges, fallen trees or underbrush piles or in hollow logs or rock crevasses.

Predators: Wolverines, other lynx, cougars, wolves and coyotes. **Kits** also preyed on by large owls.

LYNX

(*Lynx canadensis*)

Cat Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories
except Nova Scotia and P.E.I.

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

5 to 7 years

Mating:

February and March

Young born:

April and May

Gestation:

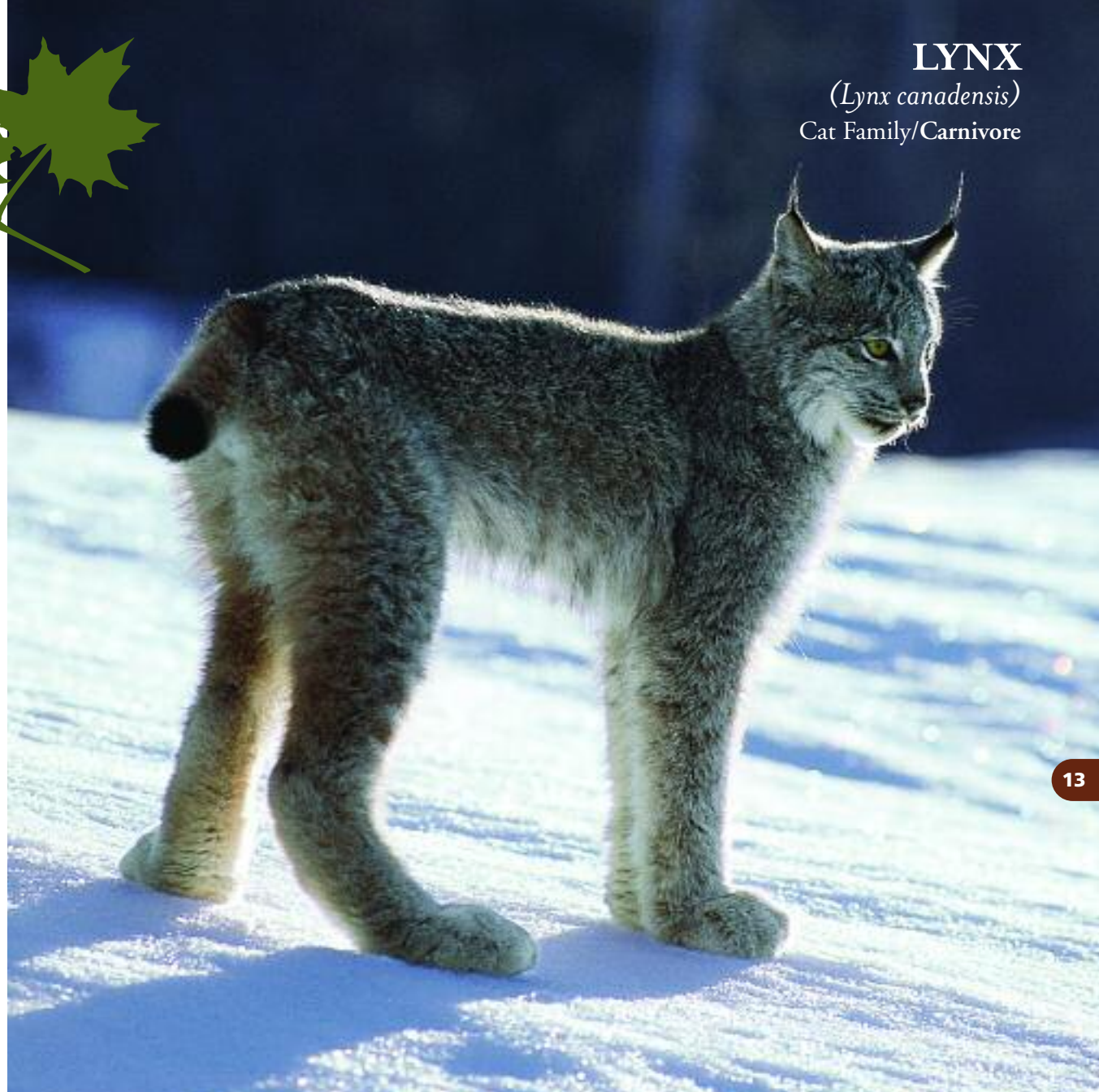
60 to 65 days
1 litter a year/1-4 kits

Habitat:

Mature forests with dense undergrowth,
regenerating forests, rocky areas
or tundra.

Management Issues:

Lynx population follows the population cycle of its main prey, the snowshoe hare. Over 200 years of fur trapping records trace a closely linked natural 10-year cycle of population peaks and crashes between the two species. When hare populations crash in an area, 40 percent of the lynx may starve to death. Others may migrate up to 800 km to better hunting grounds.



MARTEN

(*Martes americana*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



The marten, also known as the Canadian sable, is a solitary territorial animal except during the mating season. Like other members of the weasel family, the marten has ferocity and lightning-fast reflexes.



Newborns weigh about 30 g and are covered with a fine yellowish hair. Their eyes open at 4 to 6 weeks and they are **weaned** at 2 months of age. **Kits** are on their own by 3 to 4 months of age and establish their own territories when 5 to 6 months old.

Special features: Martens are about half the size of a small house cat. Males average 50 to 63 cm in length, including the tail, and weigh between 470 and 1,300 g. Females are slightly shorter in length and weigh less.

The body is long and slender, making it easier to reach prey in crevices and narrow areas. Martens have short legs and small heads with a short, pointed **muzzle** and large pointed ears. Their bushy tails are about 1/3 of their overall body length. Coat colour varies from yellowish buff to blackish brown.

Their five-toed paws have semi-retractable claws and large, furred pads that allow martens to travel easily over snow. Scent **glands** on the abdomen and under the base of the tail are used to mark their territories.

Martens have good senses of smell, sight and hearing. They are excellent climbers and good swimmers. They can move quickly both through the trees and on the ground.

Curious and excitable, martens hunt for prey by investigating holes and crevices in brush piles, downed trees and stumps. This makes them easy to bait and trap. In winter, they are known to hunt beneath the snow in tunnels created by red squirrels and mice. Martens will **cache** surplus kills.

Food: Red-backed voles, mice, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, birds, eggs, fish, frogs, insects, **carcass**, and fruit and other vegetation.

Denning: Den sites include hollow trees, under logs, stumps and rock crevices, as well as squirrel nests.

Predators: Large owls, hawks, fishers, lynx, bobcats, coyotes, wolves and other martens.



NPS Photo

Martens can climb trees with ease, but usually hunt on the ground.

MARTEN

(*Martes americana*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories
except P.E.I.

Maturity:

1-2 years

Average life span:

5 years

Mating:

July and August

Young born:

March and April

Gestation:

220 to 276 days due to **delayed
implantation** (active **gestation** 27days)
1 litter a year/Average 3 kits

Habitat:

Mature **coniferous** or mixed woods
forest, although they may seek food
in some open areas.

Management Issues:

The marten is sensitive to timber
harvesting of mature forest habitat.
Numerous protection measures
and reintroduction efforts have
kept the population abundant,
but deforestation is still a problem
for the marten in some regions.



MINK

(*Mustela vison*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



“Mink” is a Swedish word meaning “stinking animal”, referring to the musk scent it uses to mark territory and spray at intruders. **Semi-aquatic**, the mink is solitary except during mating and **rearing** season.



Newborns are naked except for short, fine, white hairs. Their eyes open after 25 days, and **weaning** occurs within 5 or 6 weeks. By 8 weeks, the **kits** begin catching their own prey. The family stays together until the end of August when they **disperse**.

Special features: Minks have a long, slender body and long, thick tail; short, stubby legs; a long neck; and a small, sharply pointed face with small ears and eyes. They have glossy dark brown to black fur with a white chin, throat and chest. Minks have a waterproof dense, oily underfur, partly webbed feet and stiff hairs between their hind toes to help in swimming. Males are larger than females, with an overall length of 45.7 to 76.2 cm. The male weighs 0.6 to 1.3 kg, and the female, 0.5 to 1 kg.

Minks can swim 15 metres under water and dive as deep as 4 metres. They swim on the surface at 1.6-2.4 km per hour. Running in low bounds 25-60 cm in length, they can achieve speeds of 12.8 km per hour.

Their eyesight is not sharp, and they rely on their sense of smell to locate prey. They will climb trees to escape danger and often stand on their hind legs to get a better view of their surroundings.

Minks are aggressive and will attack animals larger than themselves. They are very efficient hunters, often killing more than they need and **caching** any extra. In winter, they usually travel and hunt beneath the ice and in tunnels under the snow.

Food: Muskrats, rabbits, mice, fish, frogs, crayfish, turtles, snakes, insects, waterfowl and shorebirds, eggs and some plant matter.

Denning: Vacant muskrat **burrows** and beaver lodges; near water in cavities under trees, rock or brush piles; or, digs its own den in stream banks. Dens are temporary, as the mink moves often.



Mink inhabit areas with plenty of water supply.

NPS Photo

Predators: Bobcats, lynx, coyotes, foxes, wolves, fishers, river otters, other mink, large birds of prey.

MINK

(*Mustela vison*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

10 to 12 months

Average life span:

3 to 6 years

Mating:

February/March

Young born:

April and May

Gestation:

51 days

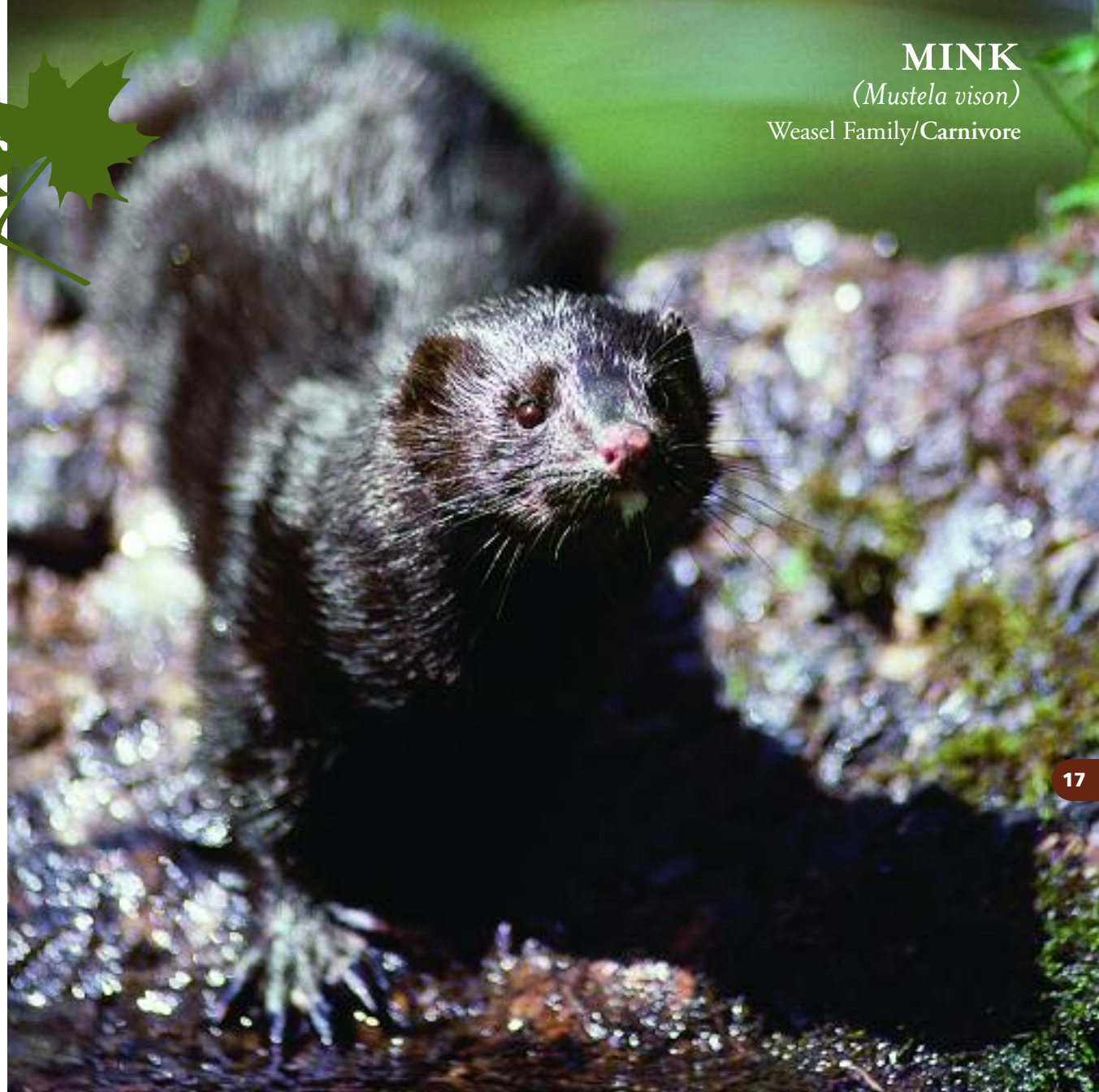
1 litter a year/Average 3-4 kits

Habitat:

Areas with good cover along streams, lakes and marshlands.

Management Issues:

Mink numbers in some areas have declined due to loss of habitat and the effects of pollution on their aquatic food supply. In pristine habitats, its numbers are stable and growing, only controlled by trapping. Minks can have a large impact on a local prey population, including farm rabbits and poultry.



MUSKRAT

(*Ondatra zibethicus*)

Rodent Family/Omnivore



NPS Photo



The muskrat's name comes from strong "musk" odor which the muskrat uses to mark its territory. However, it is not a true rat. Native to North America, muskrats are **semi-aquatic** territorial animals adapted to a wide range of climates and habitats. Like beavers, muskrats live in lodges. They live in temporary family groups that **disperse** each spring.



Newborns are born hairless and weigh about 22 grams. Their eyes open and they are fully furred, active and swimming at 2-3 weeks. They are **weaned** at three weeks and largely independent by 6 weeks.

Special features: Muskrats resemble large rats built for swimming. The average adult weighs 1 kg and measures about 50 cm long; about half of that is tail. Their tail is protected with scales and is flattened vertically to steer and propel them underwater. Flaps of skin close off the nostrils, ears and mouth for underwater feeding and traveling. Although not webbed like those of the beaver or otter, each toe of the large hind feet is edged with special hairs that make swimming easier. The short thick brown fur is buoyant and waterproof.

The two upper and lower chisel-like front teeth, each up to 2 cm long, are used in cutting stems and roots of plants. Like those of the beaver, the teeth grow continuously and must be worn down by chewing. The hand-like front feet are used in building lodges, holding food, and digging **burrows** and channels.

By conserving oxygen, muskrats can remain submerged for long periods of time. This is important in escaping enemies, digging channels and **burrows**, cutting submerged stems and roots, and traveling long distances under the ice.

Muskrats are ferocious. Fighting among muskrats is very common and often results in death, especially when populations are high and in spring when muskrats fight over territory and mates.

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Food: Roots and stalks of marsh plants: **bulrushes**, cattails, horsetails, pond weeds, wild rice, and willows; fish, frogs, crayfish and clams.

Denning: Muskrats construct two kinds of houses, the dwelling lodge and the feeding station. These are made of dead or green cattails, **bulrushes** and underwater plants piled up above the water line on an object like a log, stump or root heap. Chambers are then hollowed out. Feeding stations are smaller and contain only one chamber. In winter, a small, lodge-

like structure called a "push-up" is made along cracks or small openings in the ice. Built of muck and bottom vegetation, which is pushed up through the ice and hollowed out, push-ups are used for feeding and to give traveling muskrats air stations. Muskrats will also live in water edge **burrows** with underground entrances.

Predators: Minks, other muskrats, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, bobcats, badgers, wolverines, fishers, lynx, otters, snakes, owls and hawks.



NPS Photo

Muskrats can stay underwater for up to 17 minutes at a time.

MUSKRAT

(*Ondatra zibethicus*)

Rodent Family/Omnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

1 year

Average life span:

2 to 3 years

Mating:

March to July

Young born:

May to August

Gestation:

28 to 30 days

2 to 3 litters a year, less in the north

Average 6-8 kits

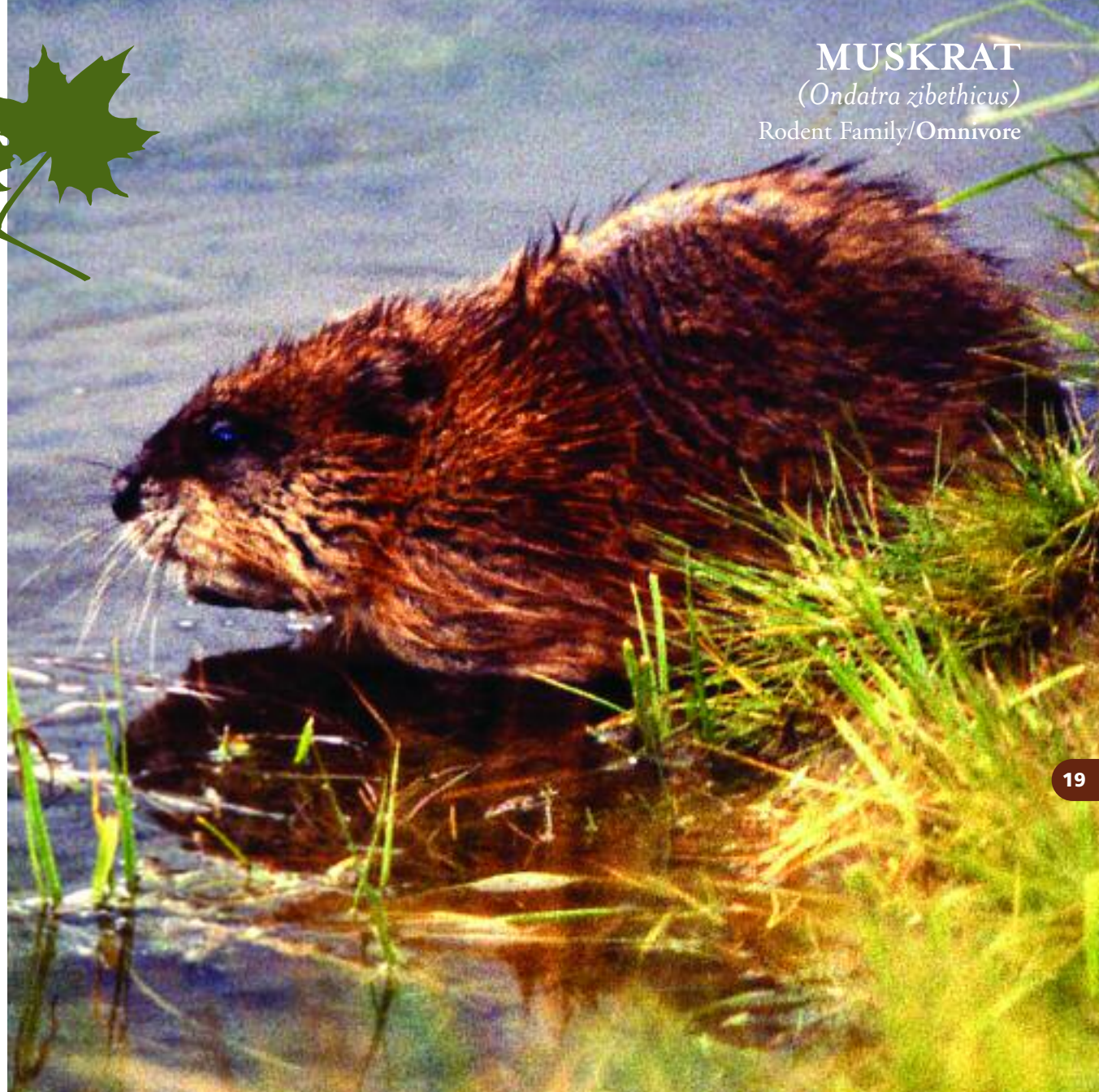
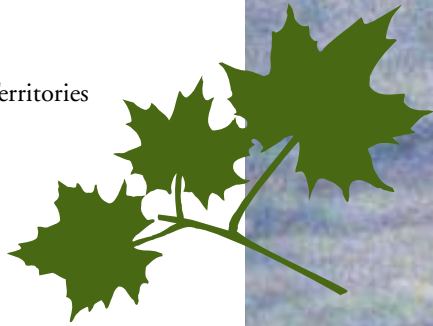
Habitat:

Slow moving streams, ditches,
marshy ponds and lakes.

Management Issues:

High reproductive rates can impact
their surrounding environment.

High population density can result in
water contamination with parasites
such as **Giardia**. Muskrat populations
go through a natural pattern of peaks
and crashes in a 6 to 10 year cycle.



RACCOON

(*Procyon lotor*)

Procyonidae Family/Omnivore



The raccoon gets its name from the Algonquian Indian word arakun, meaning, “he scratches with his hand”. The raccoon’s supposed habit of “washing” food with its front paws, called dabbling, is done with or without water to sort out edible items by touch.



This highly adaptable animal lives in a wide range of habitats, including cities. Its range is expanding northward as land is cleared for development and farming.

The raccoon is not a true hibernator but does live on its stored body fat during its winter inactivity, losing up to half its body weight by spring. It is susceptible to starvation, particularly in the first year of life and during long winters. Raccoons are **scavengers** and will consume practically any food item, plant or animal, and their diet varies with the season.

Newborns weigh about 75 g, have fur everywhere except on the tail, no teeth and closed eyes. They develop the familiar facial mask by about 10 days of age and the eyes open at 3 weeks. At 6 weeks they begin to leave the brood den. By 2 months of age, the **kits** are **weaned** and able to look for food with the female. The adult male plays no role in raising the young who remain with the female for their first year until just before a new litter is born.

Special features: Raccoons are famous for their black ringed tail and bandit-like facemask. The 5 clawed toes on the front and hind paws resemble hands and enable them to grab and hold things and to even open jars and untie knots. Male raccoons are larger than the females with an average body length of 73 to 95 cm, plus a 22 to 25 cm tail. Males typically weigh 8.6 kg and females, 7.5 kg.

The raccoon has excellent vision and hearing. Their pointed **muzzle**, toes and claws have a well-developed sense of touch.



Young raccoons remain with the mother through their first winter.

Raccoons are good swimmers. They have a good sense of balance and can climb down trees and structures both backwards and forwards. They can run at speeds up to 15 km/hr.

Food: Young birds, birds’ eggs, small mammals, **carrion**, fish, frogs, shellfish, insects, fruits, vegetables, nuts, berries and corn. They also eat garbage, lawn pests and pet and livestock food.

Denning: Raccoons live in hollow trees and logs, caves, tree branches, human-made structures or the **burrows** of other animals. Three den types are used: refuge dens, brood dens and over-wintering dens. Lined with leaves or wood chips, the den is usually more than 3 metres above the ground.

Predators: Mountain lions, bobcats, grey wolves, red foxes, coyotes, fishers, and owls; however, raccoons are not heavily preyed on.

RACCOON

(*Procyon lotor*)

Procyonidae

Family/Omnivore

Distribution:

Southern Canada except
Newfoundland and
Labrador

Maturity:

12 months

Average life span:

3 to 5 years

Mating:

February and March

Young born:

April and May

Gestation:

63 days

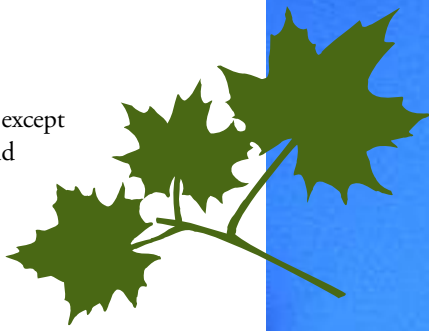
1 litter a year/Average 3 to 7 kits

Habitat:

Treed areas near water, farm land and
urban localities.

Management Issues:

Raccoons are overpopulated in many areas. They can cause significant damage to agricultural crops, urban properties and wild bird conservation areas. The primary host of the raccoon strain of rabies, they carry other diseases that can also be passed to domestic animals and humans. Live trapping and relocating raccoons may spread disease and cause starvation.



RED FOX

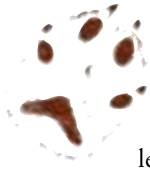
(*Vulpes vulpes*)

Canid Family/Carnivore



Red foxes are highly adaptable and one of Canada's most widespread mammals. It is estimated there are more red foxes now than when Europeans first arrived in the 16th century.

Territorial pairs mate for life although they may separate during the year, especially if hunting is poor. A solitary hunter, red foxes will catch and hide food for later use in **caches**. Foxes avoid coyote habitat.



Newborn pups weigh up to 150 g. Their eyes open at 2 weeks of age and they are **weaned** by 10 weeks. The pups leave the family den to claim their own territories by fall.

Special features: The red fox has a slim build, a deep chest and a thin waist. It has a long, pointed **muzzle**, black nose and large, pointed ears. Adult foxes weigh between 3.6 and 6.8 kg and range in length from 90 to 112 cm, of which about one-third is tail.

The red fox is most commonly a rusty red but can also be yellow, orange, black, grey or brown in colour. It has a white underbelly, black ear tips and legs. The bushy tail has a white tip, which helps distinguish it from the grey fox, which has a black tipped tail.

Their eyes are gold or yellow with distinctive vertically slit pupils, similar to those of a cat. The tail provides balance for long jumps and helps keep the fox warm when sleeping in winter. Unlike the dog, the fox has furred footpads.

Red foxes have excellent sight, hearing and sense of smell. They are able to run at speeds of over 70 km/hr.

Food: Mice, muskrats, beaver, squirrels, rabbits and hares, seal pups, eggs and birds, shellfish, fish, small reptiles, **amphibians**, insects, corn, grasses, fruits and berries, **carion**, garbage and pet food.

Denning: Hollow logs, caves, abandoned **burrows**, digs dens under dense brush or under built structures. Prefers brush-covered slopes with sandy soil. Usually red foxes maintain solitary dens, except during the breeding season and while **rearing** the young. Fox pairs may have two or more dens close to each other connected by tunnels. They will sometimes move litters of pups from one den to another to escape danger.

Predators: Wolves, coyotes, bobcats, lynx and cougars.



The red fox has slit-like pupils that can take in a maximum of light at night.



Red fox pups begin leaving the den at 5 weeks of age.

RED FOX

(*Vulpes vulpes*)

Canid Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

8 to 10 months

Average life span:

3 to 5 years

Mating:

February thru April

Young born:

March to May

Gestation:

51 to 53 days

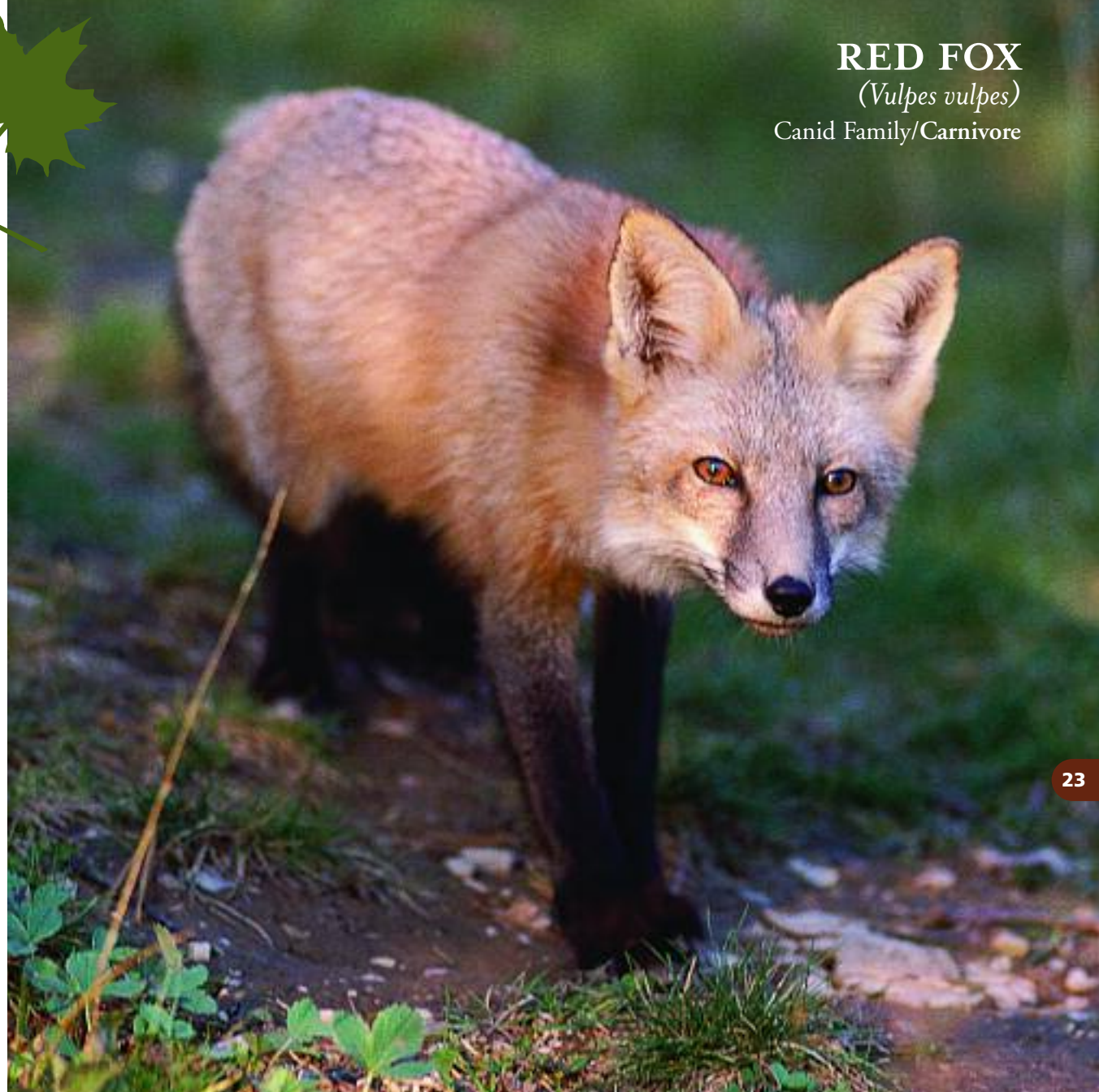
1 litter a year/Average 5 pups

Habitat:

Thinly treed woodlands, **tundra**, grasslands, hillsides, including agricultural and urban areas.

Management Issues:

A carrier of rabies and **mange**, the fox helps spread disease by its long distance travels. Foxes prey on animals that damage crops but, as **surplus killers**, are a threat to poultry and livestock.



RIVER OTTER

(*Lontra canadensis*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



The northern river otter is the most aquatic member of the weasel family. Spending most of its time in water, it dens and sometimes **forages** along the shore. It is commonly found where there is clean, fairly deep water, and healthy fish populations. Otters are active all winter, fishing under the ice and in open waters.



On land, river otters can travel widely along shorelines or between bodies of water. Like most weasels, they use scent **glands** to mark their territory when they travel.

Otters are usually solitary, but males have been observed in small “bachelor groups”.

Newborns are fully furred, averaging 140 g. Their eyes open at 25 to 28 days and, at 3 months the pups venture outside the den. They are **weaned** at 4 months, and the family unit remains together for 6 or more months until a new litter is born.

Special features: The otter has a streamlined muscular body, a long tapered tail and flattened head with a short **muzzle** and small ears. Its short legs have large fully webbed and clawed feet. The muscular, flexible tail makes up 30 to 40 percent of the total body length and is used as a rudder when swimming. Males are larger than females and reach a maximum length of about 1.4 metres and a weight of about 14 kg.

Otters can travel hundreds of metres underwater, staying submerged up to four minutes at a time. The dark brown oily fur is short and dense. This, plus a thick layer of fat under the skin, keeps otters dry and warm in water. When an otter submerges, its transparent eyelids close as do muscles in the ears and nostrils. A sensitive nose and facial whiskers help them to locate

and capture prey in murky or nighttime waters. Like all weasels, otters move on land in leaping bounds and are capable of speeds up to 29 km/hr. Rough knobs on the otter’s rear heel pads gives them good traction on ice which they cross by running and then sliding—gliding as much as 8 metres at a time.



“River otters” live in all types of deep water.

Food: Fish, shellfish, **amphibians**, reptiles, rodents, muskrats, beavers and waterfowl.

Denning: Otters live on shorelines and do not dig their own dens. They use abandoned beaver bank dens or lodges, the **burrows** of other animals, or natural openings in stumps or brush piles.

Predators: Wolves, coyotes, bobcats, lynx, cougars, and owls. Pollution is an important cause of mortality due to a build-up of **toxins** through their fish diets.

RIVER OTTER

(*Lontra canadensis*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

2-3 years (female)

5-6 years (male)

Average life span:

8 to 10 years

Mating:

March and April

Young born:

March and April

Gestation:

288 to 380 days due to

delayed implantation

(active **gestation** 60-63 days)

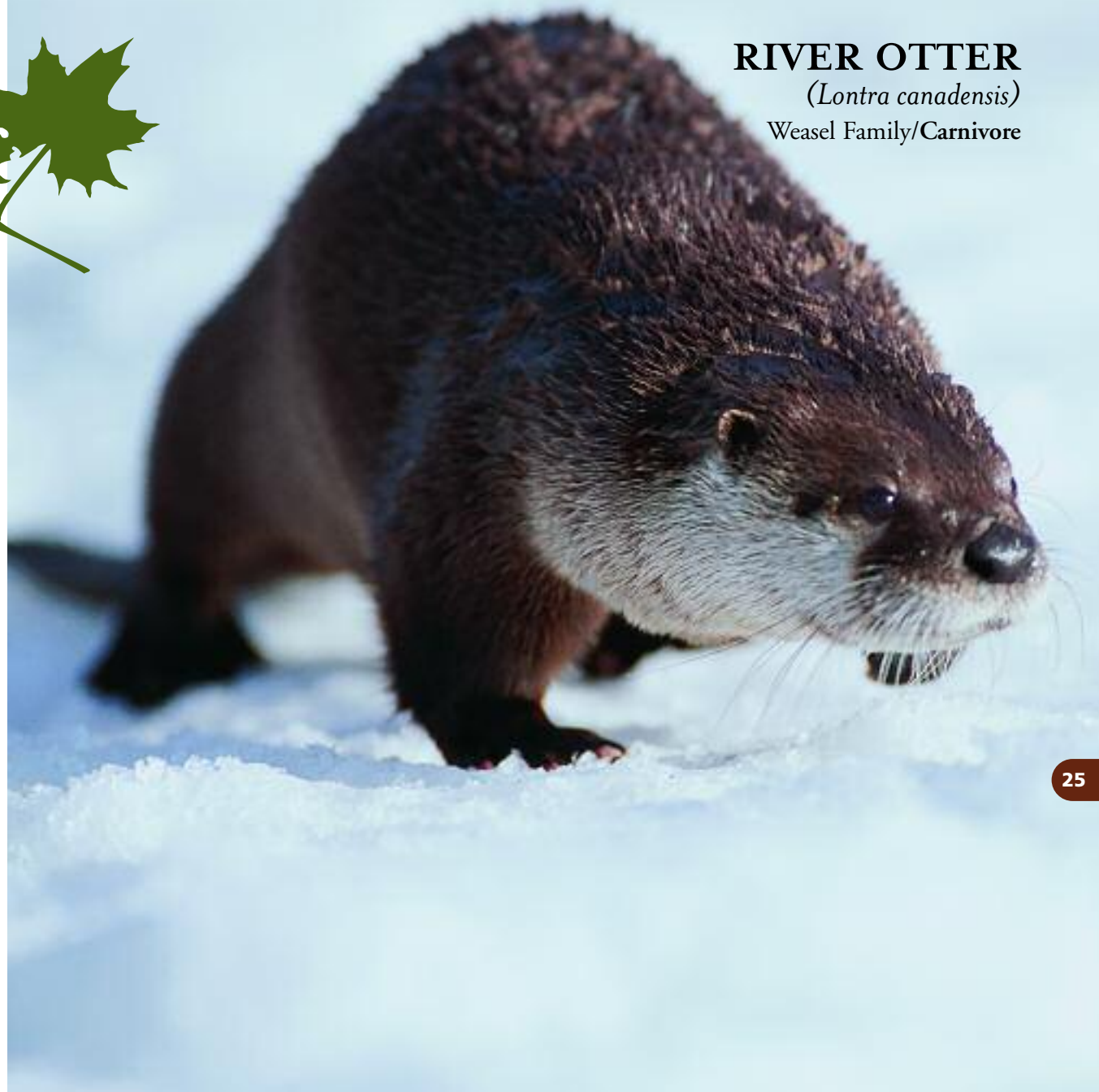
1 litter a year/Average 2 to 3 pups.

Habitat:

Wide variety of freshwater and marine habitats, including ponds, lakes, rivers, marshes, wetlands, coastal shorelines and **estuaries**.

Management Issues:

Especially sensitive to environmental pollutants in water and will disappear from polluted areas.



WEASELS

(*Mustela erminea*) (*Mustela frenata*)

Mustelidae Family/**Carnivore**/Weasel Family



NPS Photo



The ermine/short-tailed weasel is distinguished from the long-tailed weasel by its smaller size, shorter tail, white feet, longer fur and more northern distribution.



The weasel is solitary except during mating season. It marks its territory and sprays when alarmed with a strong smelling scent from musk **glands** under the base of its tail.

It has a very high metabolism and eats nearly 40 percent of its body weight every day. An efficient killer, it will engage in **surplus killing** and **cache** the extra meat in **burrows** for future use.

Newborns are furless and weigh about 14 g. Their eyes open at 5 weeks and they are **weaned** by the time they are 6 or 7 weeks old. **Kits** hunt on their own by 7 or 8 weeks and leave the family unit by four months of age.

Special features: Its long, thin body makes it easy for the weasel to follow prey into underground **burrows** and snow tunnels. Weasels have short legs, triangular shaped heads with long whiskers, and small rounded ears and eyes. Males are 10-15 percent larger than females. Ermine can reach 33 cm in length and 170 g in weight. Long-tailed weasels can grow to 45 cm in body length and up to 340 g in weight.

For camouflage, the weasel's coat changes from dark brown with a light-coloured throat and underbelly in summer to white for the winter. The fur on the tip of the tail stays black year round and flashes in the white snow to distract and confuse predators.

Weasels have relatively large sharp teeth and strong jaws. Their sight is not as well developed as their excellent senses of smell and hearing. Their paws have five toes with sharp curved claws.

Good swimmers and climbers, weasels often survey their surroundings by standing on their hind legs. As with all members of the weasel family, they are bold and ferocious fighters.

This skilled predator moves swiftly both above and below ground. It hunts on the ground in a zigzag pattern, moving in leaps of up to 50 cm. Ermine can run easily over snow.

Females hunt in tunnels more than males, which may explain the higher number of males that are trapped.

Food: Mice, rats, voles, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, shrews, frogs, lizards, small snakes, birds, eggs, bats, insects.

Denning: Abandoned **burrows** of other animals or dens in hollow logs, under tree roots, brush or rock piles or in abandoned buildings. Dens are lined with the hair of their prey.

Predators: Large hawks, owls, foxes, wolverines, large snakes, coyotes.



The brown summer fur of weasels turns white in winter.

NPS Photo

SHORT-TAILED WEASEL/ERMINE (*Mustela erminea*)

LONG-TAILED WEASEL (*Mustela frenata*)

Mustelidae Family/Carnivore

Weasel Family

Distribution:

Short-tailed weasel (ermine) in all Provinces and Territories. Long-tailed weasel in southern Canada.

Maturity:

Female: 3-4 months,
Male: 12-14 months

Average life span:

5 to 6 years

Mating:

July and August

Young born:

Mid-April to Mid-May

Gestation:

240-270 days due to **delayed implantation**

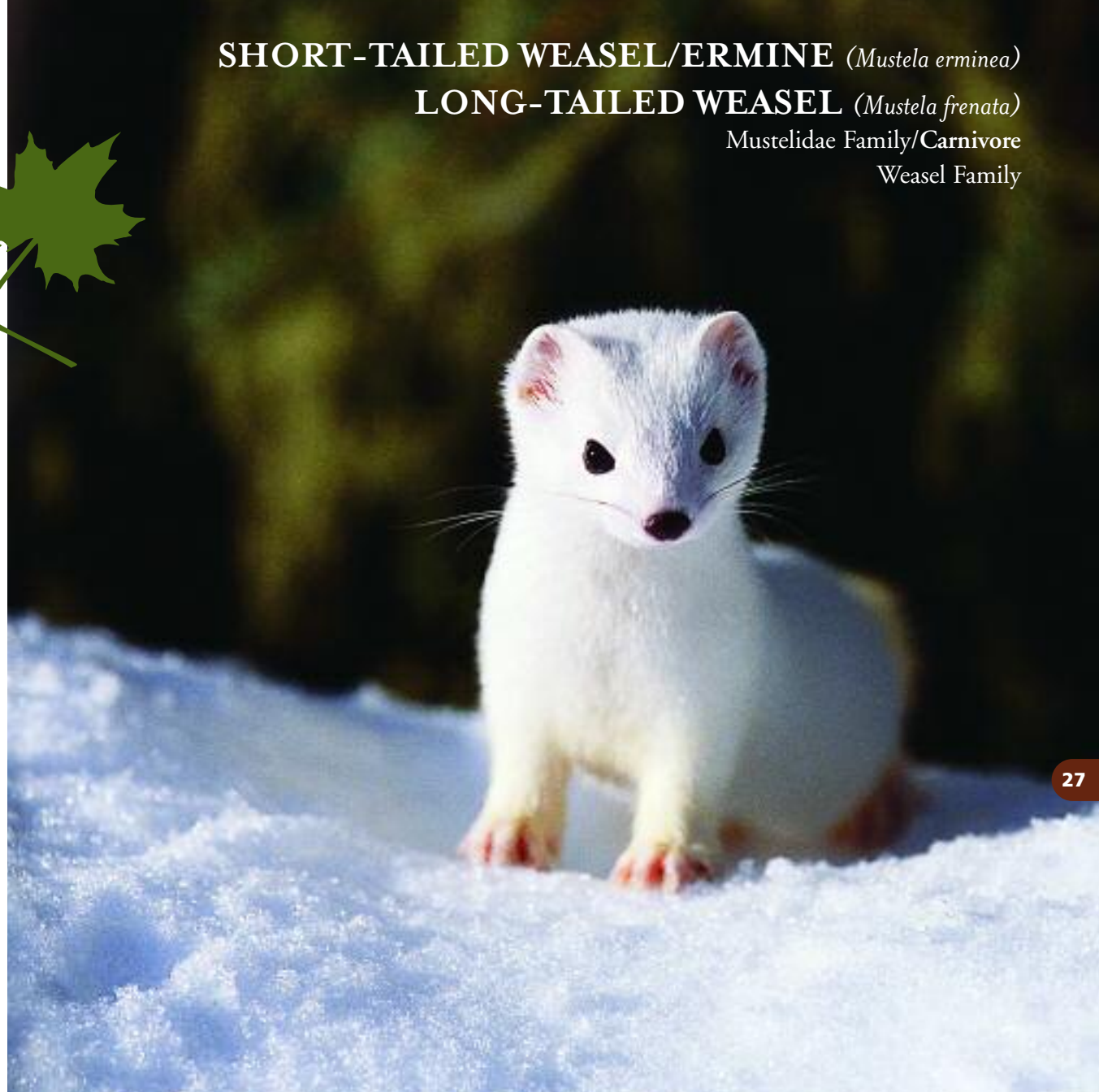
1 litter a year/Average 6 to 7 kits

Habitat:

Forest edges, **tundra**, meadows, riverbanks and marshes, hedges and fence rows

Management Issues:

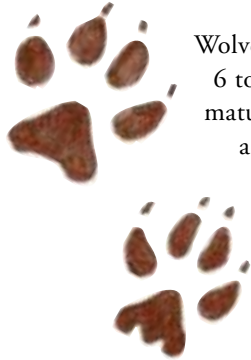
A beneficial predator, eating mice and other rodents that can cause problems, it is also a threat to poultry and rabbit farmers.



WOLF

(*Canis lupus*)

Canid Family/Carnivore



Wolves are territorial and elusive **pack** animals. A **pack** averages 6 to 10 members ranging in age from that year's pups to mature adults. Organized by strict social ranking, each animal is subject to those of higher rank. Usually only the dominant male and female have a successful litter which is raised by the **pack**. Wolves hunt together for **ungulates** in late autumn and winter, and alone or in pairs for smaller animals in summer.

Newborns weigh 0.5 kg. Their blue eyes open within 10 to 12 days and change colour to gold or orange between 8 and 16 weeks of age. Pups begin eating foods **regurgitated** by the parents 2 weeks after birth and are fully **weaned** when 8 to 10 weeks old. The 2-month-old pups leave the **whelping** den when the **pack** moves to a summer living area or rendezvous site often near a bog or swamp. Young remain with the **pack** or leave to search for a mate and a new territory.

Special features: Wolves resemble a large German Shepherd dog but have larger paws, yellow slanted eyes, longer legs, and bigger teeth. Larger and bulkier than a coyote, wolves have smaller ears and carry their tail straight back, while the coyote generally carries its tail pointed down. Wolves are between 1.3 to 1.9 metres in total length. Adult males weigh between 32 and 45 kg and females between 24 and 41 kg.

The majority of wolves are various shades of grey, but can be black, white, red and brown. The paws have webbing between each toe and are relatively large making it easier for wolves to move over snow. Special blood vessels keep paw pads from freezing.

Wolves walk on their toes, enabling them to run faster and more quietly than animals that run on the full foot. Wolves can run for long periods of time and reach chase speeds of 65 km/hr.



Wolves hunt in packs in the winter.

Food: Deer, moose, bison, elk, caribou and muskox. Beavers, river otters, lynx, martens, minks, wolverines, ground squirrels, rabbits, rodents and birds.

Denning: Hollow logs, caves, or dug holes. The den is usually on high ground near an open water source, and has an open "room" at the end of an underground or hillside tunnel.

Predators: Other wolves, bears, coyotes, cougars.

WOLF

(*Canis lupus*)

Canid Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All of Canada as far east as Labrador.

Maturity:

2 years

Average life span:

6 to 8 years

Mating:

March and April

Young born:

April and May

Gestation:

60 to 63 days

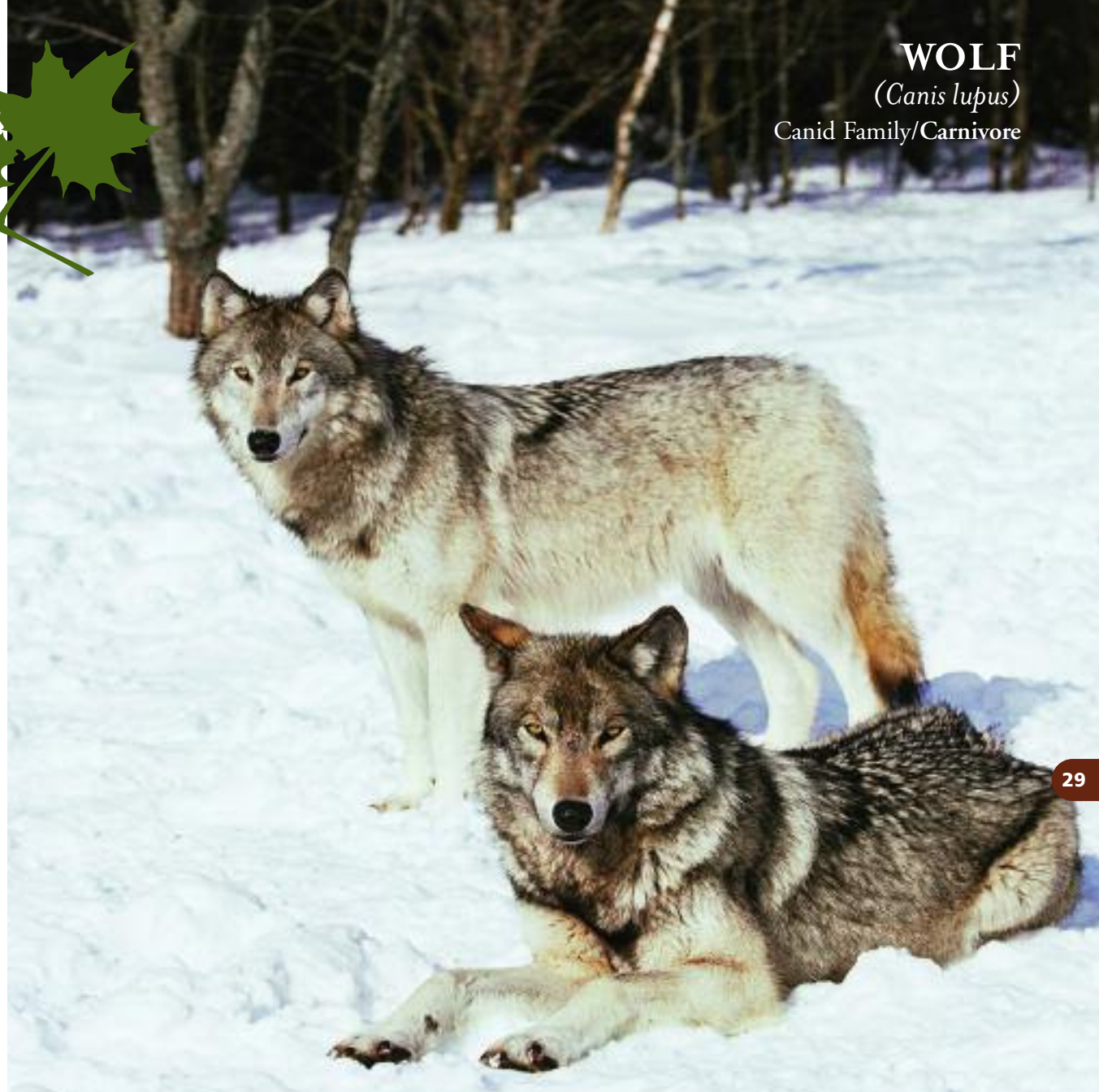
1 litter a year/Average 4 to 7 pups

Habitat:

Rough and hilly areas in remote forests, **tundra**, bogs, grasslands, and deserts.

Management Issues:

Wolves can impact prey populations of **ungulates** and small mammals and they prey on livestock and pets. Wolves are susceptible to the same infections as domestic dogs and epidemics can drastically reduce wolf populations in a given area.



WOLVERINE

(*Gulo gulo*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



Wolverines are the largest member of the weasel family. They are solitary and reclusive animals that are rarely seen. In Canada, there are two separate populations: the Eastern population of Quebec and Labrador and the Western population, which ranges from Northern Ontario to the west coast. Called the “hyena of the north”, wolverines primarily feed off wolf and bear kills and **carrion**, but they will kill prey as large as caribou. Like other weasels, the wolverine **caches** excess food and uses a strong smelling scent to mark its territory. It has a reputation as a fierce fighter and is remarkably strong.

Young are born with white fur and closed eyes. At birth they weigh an average of 84.0 grams, and are about 121.0 mm long. They are **weaned** at 8 to 10 weeks, begin foraging with the mother at 10 to 12 weeks and leave the mother when they reach adult size at 6 to 8 months.

Special features: Wolverine resembles a small bear with a long bushy tail. An adult is about 1 metre long; the size of a medium-sized dog. Males typically weigh 12 to 18 kg; females 8 to 12 kg. Adults have long, thick, glossy dark brown fur with a yellowish side stripe running from the shoulders to the tail. They may have light patches on the head, neck, chest or legs. The waterproof fur is frost resistant in very cold weather. The wolverine has short legs and its large furry feet act like snowshoes. Its five toes have long, partly retractable claws used for digging and climbing. It has a round head, small eyes and short rounded ears. Powerful muscles in the shoulders, neck and jaw make it easy for wolverines to crush bones and to feed on frozen prey or **carrion**.

Wolverines have good senses of smell and hearing but poor eyesight. They are not fast runners but can travel for long distances, climb trees, and swim. Wolverine will fight larger or more numerous predators over food. They hunt large prey by pouncing on them from tall rocks or trees.



NPS Photo

If the wolverine were the size of a bear, it would be the strongest animal on earth.

Food: Rodents, marmots, ground squirrels, hares, mountain sheep, mountain goats, caribou, **carrion**, various berries and roots.

Denning: Uprooted trees, caves and rocky crevices, or snow tunnels.

Predators: Wolves, bears and other large **carnivores**, young may be killed by adult male wolverines.

WOLVERINE

(*Gulo gulo*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore

Distribution:

All provinces and territories from
Labrador west

Maturity:

2 years

Average life span:

5 to 10 years

Mating:

June/July

Young born:

February/March

Gestation:

270 days due to **delayed implantation**

Actual **gestation** is 30-40 days

1 litter every 1 to 3 years/

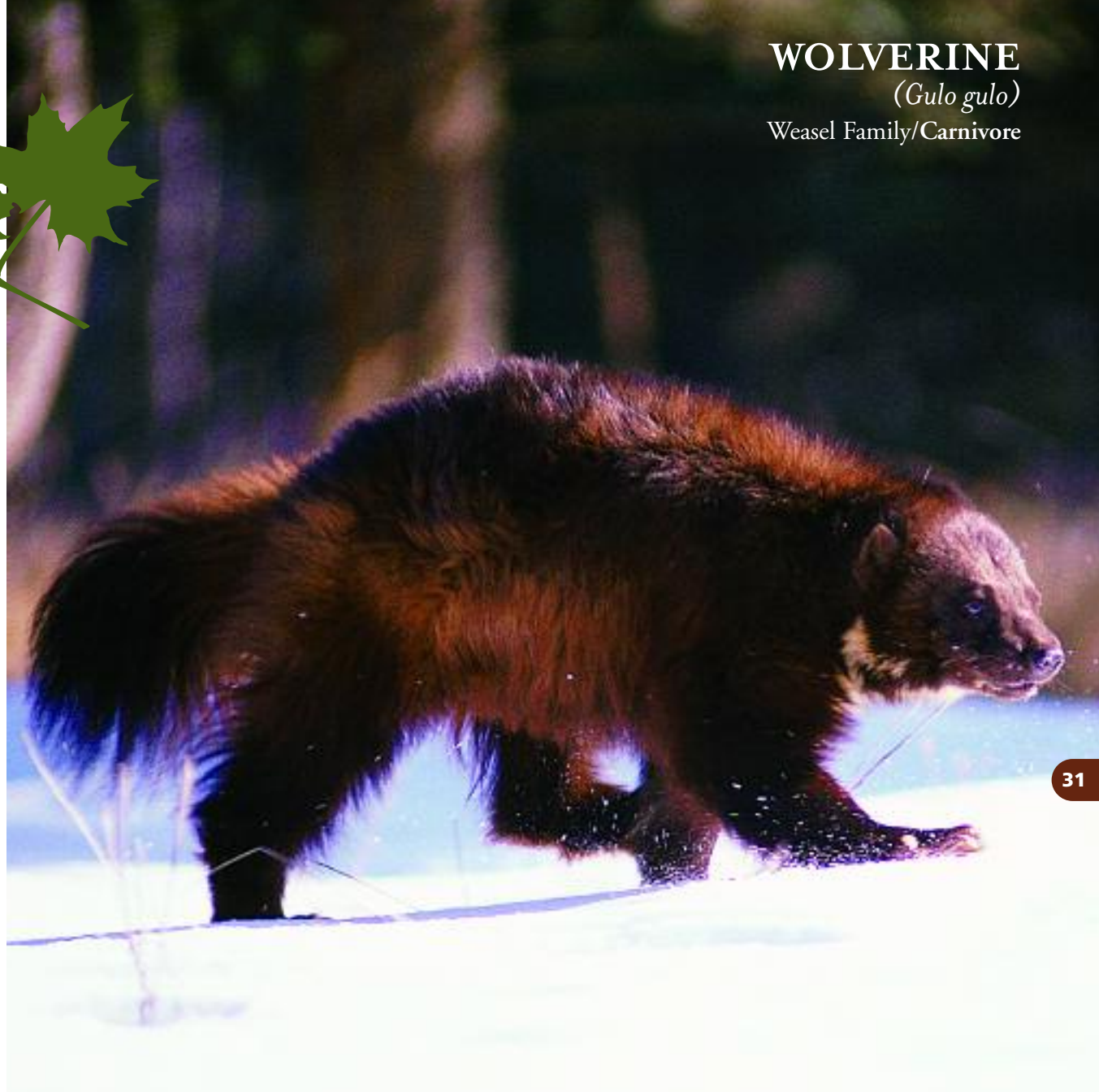
Average 2 to 3 **kits**

Habitat:

Undisturbed wilderness in remote
forests, mountains and **tundra**.

Management Issues:

Habitat disturbance is a major threat
to wolverines so most local wolverine
populations need extra careful
management. Each province and
territory limits the number of animals
that can be captured and the Eastern
wolverine is not allowed to be hunted
or trapped.



GLOSSARY



Amphibians: Cold-blooded animals that live both on land and in water.

Bulrush: A tall water plant, having a brown cigar-shaped flower head.

Burrow: Hole or tunnel dug by a small animal as a dwelling.

Cache: A hiding place, structure, or device used for storing food.

Carnivore: Animal that primarily eats other animals.

Carrion: Dead decomposing animal flesh.

Coniferous: Cone-bearing evergreen trees.

Crustacean: Having a hard shell and usually aquatic; for example, crab, lobster, shrimp.

Cub: A young animal.

Culvert: Tunnel or channel, carrying water under a road.

Deciduous: Tree that sheds its leaves annually.

Delayed implantation: To time birth for favourable conditions, the embryonic egg is kept in a state of dormancy.

Disperse: Move away from the family unit or birth territory.

Estuary: The mouth of a large river where it meets the tide.

Forage: A method of finding food that does not involve hunting live animals.

Gestation: Pregnancy.

Gland: An organ in an animal's body that makes a substance for release.

Giardia: An intestinal parasite that causes "beaver-fever" in humans, pets and other animals.

Herbivore: Animal that eats only plants. Many herbivores have special digestive systems that let them digest all kinds of plants, including grasses.

Hybrid: The offspring resulting from crossbreeding of different plants or animals.

Instinctive: Involuntary response or reaction to certain kinds of stimuli.

Invertebrates: Insects and shellfish.

Kit: A young animal.

Mange: An infestation of the skin of animals caused by parasitic mites.

Mottled: Mark with spots or smears of colour.

Muzzle: The snout of an animal.

Omnivore: Animal that eats both animals and certain plant parts (fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts).

Pack: A group of animals.

Predation: The act of preying or plundering.

Rear: To raise young.

Regurgitate: To vomit undigested food.

Ruff: Conspicuous growth of hair.

Scavenger: Animal that consumes the food left by others.

Scent mounds: Mud and vegetation piles marked with urine or animal scent.

Semi-aquatic: Living partly on land and partly in water.

Surplus killing: Killing more prey animals than can be eaten at once.

Toxin: A poisonous substance produced by living cells or organisms capable of causing disease.

Tundra: Treeless areas in the Arctic and on mountains caused by low temperature and short growing seasons.

Ungulate: Hoofed mammal.

Wean: Eating food instead of drinking mother's milk.

Whelp: Birth.

Yearling: An animal between the age of one and two years.



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