

A GUIDE TO MISSOURI'S

# COMMON MAMMALS



MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

## ***A Guide to Missouri's Common Mammals***

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# GET TO KNOW MISSOURI'S MAMMALS

Mammals may be the animal group that people are most familiar with, perhaps because we are mammals ourselves. As mammals, we have hair, are warm blooded (endothermic), and produce milk to feed our newborns. These traits are shared by all mammals — whether wild, domestic, or human — and are what set mammals apart from other kinds of animals.

In Missouri, more than 70 species of wild mammals can be found. They range in size from the tiny, such as mice and shrews, to the large, such as elk and bears, with many species falling in between. Each species is adapted to live where it lives and eat what it eats. Otters, muskrats, and beavers have oily fur for spending time in lakes, rivers, and streams, while moles, shrews, and badgers have claws for burrowing underground. Squirrels' tails help them balance while climbing in trees and jumping from branch to branch, and bats (not covered in this guide) have wings and take to the air.

You can tell what type of diet a mammal has by looking at its teeth. The large, chisel-like teeth of beavers and other rodents are for cutting and gnawing. The sharp canine teeth of coyotes and bobcats allow them to tear meat. Deer have teeth for browsing on leaves and plants. Bears and raccoons, both omnivores, have well-developed canine teeth for eating meat as well as flat molars for chewing plants. Biologists use the number of teeth and the amount of growth and wear on teeth to estimate a mammal's age.

Hair, rather than feathers or scales, cover the bodies of most mammals, providing warmth and protection. Many species have coarse outer hairs called guard hairs, and soft, finer hairs underneath. Many mammals also have whiskers, which are a type of hair that provides some sensory abilities. Hair on the body can be raised or flattened, changing the amount of air between the strands. Heat from a mammal's body warms the air in



American mink

NOFPADOL PAOITHONG

the spaces between the hairs, and that warmed air within the hairs helps keep the animal warmer in cold temperatures. Mammals also shed their fur as the seasons change and may have thicker coats in winter than in summer.

All mammals have mammary glands. In female mammals, these glands produce milk, a liquid full of nutrients and antibodies that the mother feeds her offspring until they are able to eat solid food. The length of time youngsters depend on milk varies by species. Parental care also varies. In some species, such as deer and rabbits, only the female cares for the young, while in others, like foxes, the male helps feed and protect them.

Some mammals live in groups, but some species are solitary, seeking others only during breeding seasons. Otters live in family groups as do beavers. Deer and elk often gather in small groups, with females and youngsters staying together or, outside of breeding season, males travel in bachelor groups. Male and female bobcats meet during mating season but are alone the rest of the year. For most mammals, offspring remain with their mother (or both parents) until they are old enough to have offspring of their own, at which time the parents send them away to find their own territories and mates.

Mammals communicate in several ways: sound, display behaviors, scent markings, and touch. Many mammals have a variety of vocalizations and may also deliver messages with nonvocal sounds, such as clicking their teeth together, stomping their feet, or snorting. Some vocalizations can travel so animals can communicate over a distance. Coyotes howl to let other coyotes know where they are. Beavers slap their tails on the water to alert others of danger. White-tailed deer raise their tails when alarmed; other deer see the white of the tail and know that danger is near. Animals such as bobcats and bears use scent glands to mark their territory. Otters may groom and nuzzle with each other, which helps strengthen the bonds between them.



**Eastern fox squirrel**

NOPPADOL PHOTHONG

## Living with Mammals/Sharing Our Space

Humans and wildlife often overlap in the areas in which they live. As more habitat is transformed to farmland, businesses, and housing, more animals will enter “human territory” because space is limited. While it can be a joy to see these wild creatures out your windows, their modes of living and feeding can sometimes damage the structures and items that we humans have built and value. Raccoons may knock over trash cans to eat food scraps. Rabbits or deer may eat the lettuce in your garden or the flowers in your landscaping. Squirrels may gnaw on wooden decks or chew on electrical wiring. If these or other mammals are causing trouble at your home or business, there are things you can do to deter them. See [short.mdc.mo.gov/ZeV](http://short.mdc.mo.gov/ZeV) for information on wildlife damage control.

## Report Wildlife Sightings

You can help MDC biologists learn more about wildlife locations and movements by sharing your sightings. MDC is taking reports for sightings of black bears, elk, mountain lions, feral hogs, rare furbearers, and small mammals such as Franklin's ground squirrels and plains pocket gophers. For information about reporting these species, visit [short.mdc.mo.gov/4HS](http://short.mdc.mo.gov/4HS).



Look for this icon throughout the booklet, indicating species for which MDC is taking reports.

## Leave Baby Animals Alone

As tempting as it may be to pick up or pet a baby rabbit, fawn, or other young mammal, it is best to leave them alone. Just because you see a baby mammal by itself does not mean that it has been orphaned. Parents rarely abandon their offspring. Wildlife parents cannot stay with their young all day and must leave periodically to get



White-tailed deer fawn

NOFPADOL PAOIHONG

food and water for themselves or to bring back to their young. The parent animal may also have been scared off by your approach and will return to their offspring as soon as you leave the area. Furthermore, wild mammals may carry mites, ticks, fleas, or diseases that can spread to people if you touch them. So, enjoy seeing wild mammals and their babies, but watch them from a distance.

## Wildlife Disease

Just as humans can get sick, so can wildlife. Common wild mammal diseases include distemper, rabies, mange, and tularemia. Some diseases only affect specific groups of mammals while others can infect any mammal, and some of these diseases can also infect pets and people.

If you find a sick or dead animal, you should avoid handling it. If you must move a dead animal, always wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards.

Monitoring possible disease outbreaks is critical to protecting the health of wildlife in Missouri. Please report the following:

- Single deer that appear sick, especially deer that are skinny and acting oddly
- Three or more sick or dead mammals
- Five or more sick or dead birds
- Groups of sick and dead amphibians or reptiles

Report observations of sick or dead wildlife that meet these criteria to MDC online at [short.mdc.mo.gov/4KD](https://short.mdc.mo.gov/4KD). To make a verbal report, please contact your local MDC office.

For an overview and descriptions of common wildlife diseases, go to [short.mdc.mo.gov/Zsf](https://short.mdc.mo.gov/Zsf).



Nine-banded  
armadillo

JIM RATHERT

# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide covers Missouri's most common mammals. There are several small mammal species, especially types of mice and rats, that are not included here. A separate guide will cover Missouri's bats.

## Mammal Size

Adult mammals of any given species can vary in size, just as humans do. The sizes given for animals in this booklet show the range of sizes rather than an average size, and the range covers both male and female size.

Full length = distance from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail.

Tail = length from the base of the tail to the tip.

In many mammal species, the males are larger and heavier than the females. In this booklet, this size difference is noted only when the difference between male and female is significant.

## Definitions

**Game Species:** The species may be hunted or trapped during the specified seasons and with approved methods as stated in the *Wildlife Code of Missouri*.

**Invasive Species:** A species that is nonnative, often reproducing and spreading rapidly, competing with native species and causing harm to the environment, economy, and/or human health.

**Species of Conservation Concern:** We are concerned about the species' ability to remain on the landscape for a long time, either because populations are declining; it lives in limited, specialized habitats; or information about the species' status is lacking.

**State Endangered:** A species that is in danger of becoming extinct within the state of Missouri.

# SPECIES ACCOUNTS

# Nine-Banded Armadillo

## *Dasyus novemcinctus*

**About:** In Spanish, armadillo means “little armored one,” and that seems a fitting description for this unusual mammal. Instead of an outer covering of hair, armadillos have bony plates covered by leathery skin. The only hair on an armadillo is between the plates and on the underside of the body. The head has a plate and the body has two main plates with nine narrower, movable plates (bands) in the middle. Plates even cover their short legs and tail. Their overall color is mottled brown to yellowish white. They have strong feet and claws for digging. Armadillos may be found in a variety of habitats but seem to prefer oak-hickory or shortleaf pine forests. They dig burrows in wooded bottomlands, brushy areas, and fields with ground cover and loose soil. When crossing streams, an armadillo may hold its breath and walk across the bottom, but if crossing a large body of water, it will hold air in its stomach and gut, which allows it to float and swim across.

### **Missouri Distribution:**

Primarily in the southern half of the state but may be found as far north as the Missouri-Iowa state line; the population is expanding northward.

### **Size:**

**Total length:** 23–31 inches

**Tail:** 9½–14½ inches

**Weight:** 5¼–17¼ pounds

**Diet:** Mostly insects and other invertebrates, including beetles, ants, earthworms, and the larva of beetles and flies. Fungi and fruits may also be eaten, and occasionally a reptile, bird, or eggs.



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# Virginia Opossum

*Didelphis virginiana*

**Missouri Distribution:**  
Statewide.

**About:** The Virginia opossum is a medium-sized mammal with long, coarse, grayish-white fur (sometimes darker). Its head is white with a slender muzzle, pink nose, and hairless ears. It has short legs and a long scaly tail with few hairs; the tail is used for grasping. Adults have 50 teeth, more than any other mammal in Missouri. As North America's only marsupial, opossums give birth to tiny, underdeveloped young that climb into the female's belly pouch to nurse and continue growing. As the young get bigger and the pouch becomes crowded, some may ride on the back of the female, clinging to her hair. Opossums are generally nocturnal but can be active during daylight. When in danger, they may "play dead," rolling on their side and temporarily becoming limp, then running off to safety at the first opportunity. They also may show their teeth, hiss, and drool when confronted.

## Size:

**Total length:** 24-34 inches

**Tail:** 9-15 inches

**Weight:** 4-15 pounds

Males are usually larger than females.

**Diet:** Plants and animals, including insects, carrion, amphibians, reptiles, bird eggs, and worms. They eat many fruits and may search for food from garbage cans.



DAVID STONNER

# Eastern Cottontail

## *Sylvilagus floridanus*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The eastern cottontail is a medium-sized rabbit with long ears, large hind legs, large hind feet, soft fur, and a short, fluffy tail. Its overall color is reddish to grayish brown with black flecks. Its underside is grayish white and tail is brownish on top with white underneath. When cottontails run, the tail is usually turned upwards, making the white part of the tail visible. They prefer open brushy areas and forest edges where they can seek cover in thickets, bushes, fence rows, tall grass, or brush piles. Within these areas, they create and rest in slight depressions known as "forms." Cottontails may temporarily use the underground dens of other animals during times of heavy snow or severe cold. Females dig shallow nesting cavities in the ground for their young and cover them with grass and fur. They can have up to 8 litters per year, averaging 4 to 6 offspring per litter. They usually nurse at dawn and dusk, and watch over the nest from a nearby form.

### Size:

**Total length:** 14-19 inches

**Tail:** 1½-3 inches

**Weight:** 2-3¼ pounds

**Diet:** A variety of plants. They favor bluegrass, wheat, and clovers, and also show preference for Korean lespedeza, crabgrass, timothy, certain sedges, forbs, and cultivated plants. During times of heavy snow cover, they eat twigs, bark, buds, and the sprouts of shrubs, vines, and trees.



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# Swamp Rabbit

## *Sylvilagus aquaticus*

**About:** The swamp rabbit is similar to an eastern cottontail but somewhat larger; its ears are more rounded, fur is coarser with a yellowish tone and more black mottling,

and hind feet are reddish-brown on top. This species lives in wet lowland forests, on stream banks, and along drainage ditches. To evade predators, swamp rabbits will swim in water, diving and coming up to hide under roots or other overhanging vegetation. For resting areas (forms), they use rocks or logs that stick up out of the water and are covered with vegetation as well as hollow logs, brush piles, grassy patches, or thickets of cane. They can have 5 litters per year, with an average of 3 to 4 young. The young of swamp rabbits are more developed at birth than the young of cottontails. Swamp rabbits defecate on top of logs and stumps. Biologists look for these latrine sites to detect the species' presence.

### Missouri Distribution:

Southeastern Missouri in the Mississippi lowlands. Swamp rabbit populations have declined due to habitat loss and fragmentation of bottomland hardwood forests.

### Size:

**Total length:** 16–22 inches

**Tail:** 1½–3 inches

**Weight:** 2½–6 pounds

**Diet:** Grasses, sedges, and herbaceous plants that grow in wet soils, aquatic plants, and the stems of cane. In winter they will eat the twigs and bark of woody plants such as blackberry, hazelnut, and spicebush.



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# Thirteen-Lined Ground Squirrel

## *Ictidomys tridecemlineatus*



### Missouri Distribution:

Scattered populations in northwest and southwest Missouri.

**About:** The thirteen-lined ground squirrel is a slender ground-dwelling rodent that has 13 stripes running lengthwise along its back and sides (some individuals may have a few more stripes or a few less). The stripes alternate light and dark: light stripes are yellowish to white; dark stripes are reddish brown to black with light spots running down the middle. This species has large eyes, small ears, a fur-covered tail, long claws for digging, and cheek pouches for transporting food. Thirteen-lined ground squirrels prefer flat, open, short grasslands or open dry fields with short vegetation. Their underground burrows have several entrances. Usually all but the main entrance are plugged with sod or grass during the day, and at night they plug the main entrance too. A chamber within the tunnel is lined with dry grass and used for sleep, escape, nesting, and hibernation. The squirrels also build food-storage areas in the tunnels. They are considered solitary, each with their own burrow, but individuals live near one another and form colonies. To prepare for hibernation, these squirrels eat to gain weight during summer; by fall they can weigh nearly twice as much as they do in spring.

### Size:

**Total length:** 7-12½ inches

**Tail:** 2½-5 inches

**Weight:** 4-5 ounces (spring),  
8-9 ounces (fall)

**Diet:** A mix of plants and animals. Seeds, fruits, nuts, roots, grasses, legumes, and herbaceous plants; beetles, grasshoppers, other insects, worms, lizards, mice, baby rabbits, eggs and young ground-nesting birds, and carrion.



STEVEN KATOVICH, BUGWOOD.ORG

# Franklin's Ground Squirrel

## *Poliocitellus franklinii*



### Missouri Distribution:

Restricted to the northern quarter of the state.

**About:** At first glance, Franklin's ground squirrel resembles the eastern gray squirrel, but its tail is shorter and less bushy, and its ears are shorter and rounder. It also has cheek pouches, longer claws, and a yellowish hue on its rump. Its overall color is brownish gray with black speckles that give it a barred effect. Its tail is a mix of black and gray, blacker toward the tip. Franklin's ground squirrels live where prairies meet woodlands, preferring tall- to midgrass prairies that are infrequently grazed and that have fencerows, gullies, and wooded banks. Their burrows are larger, deeper, and more hidden than those of thirteen-lined ground squirrels. During summer, they put on extra weight for hibernation, which begins in late August to October and ends in early to mid-April. Living in colonies of 10 or more individuals, these squirrels spend the bulk of their lives underground, coming out on bright, sunny days, while staying in during windy, rainy, overcast, or frigid weather. Their high-pitched whistles may be mistaken for bird calls.

### Size:

**Total length:** 14–16½ inches

**Tail:** 4½–6¼ inches

**Weight:** ¾–1 pound (spring),  
1–1½ pounds (fall)

**Diet:** Mostly plants, including seeds, roots, fruits, grasses, herbaceous plants, garden vegetables, and grains. The remainder is insects, worms, frogs, toads, mice, fish, crayfish, small birds and their eggs, young rabbits, other ground squirrels, and carrion.



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# Eastern Gray Squirrel

## *Sciurus carolinensis*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The eastern gray squirrel is a slender tree squirrel that has an overall gray appearance with some yellowish brown mixed in on its head, sides, and feet. The fur on its body is relatively short, but the tail has long, gray hair with bands of black and tan and fringed with white. In Missouri, gray squirrels are common in hardwood forests and prefer areas with a bushy understory. They also reside in urban and suburban areas, especially in parks with trees that provide food and nest cavities. While they may nest in tree cavities, gray squirrels also use twigs and leaves to build nests in the forks of tree branches. They usually den alone, but live in loose colonies, using body postures and vocalizations to communicate with one another. Gray squirrels are most active in early morning and late afternoon. They do not hibernate.

### Size:

**Total length:** 14-21 inches

**Tail:** 7-10 inches

**Weight:** ¾-1½ pounds

**Diet:** Nuts and fruits — particularly from oak, hickory, pecan, walnut, elm, and mulberry — and field corn are the main staples. In spring they eat buds and twigs. Insects, insect larvae, eggs, and young birds are eaten on occasion.



NOFPADOLPAOHONG

# Eastern Fox Squirrel

## *Sciurus niger*

**About:** The eastern fox squirrel is similar to a gray squirrel in both appearance and habits. It has a somewhat larger, heavier body; reddish fur; and a squarer face. In Missouri, this species lives primarily in oak-hickory forests and wooded areas along farmland. It may also be found in some urban areas. Like gray squirrels, fox squirrels build leafy nests in tree cavities and the forks of branches. They usually live alone, but pairs may stay together during the beginning of the mating season. Daily activity begins in early morning, slows at midday, and picks up again in late afternoon. They return to their nests around dusk, ending their day a little earlier than gray squirrels. Like their gray counterparts, fox squirrels run along tree branches, leaping from tree to tree, and also spend time on the ground, hopping about as they forage.

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide, but more abundant in the northern and western portions of the state.

### Size:

**Total length:** 19-29 inches

**Tail:** 7-14 inches

**Weight:** 1-3 pounds

**Diet:** Their diet and feeding habits are essentially the same as those of gray squirrels, but Osage orange fruits are also important foods for fox squirrels in Missouri. They may consume more corn than gray squirrels because more live near agricultural fields in northern and western Missouri.



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# Eastern Chipmunk

## *Tamias striatus*

**About:** The eastern chipmunk is a small squirrel that uses an underground burrow for shelter and food storage.

Its overall color is reddish brown, with tan feet and a white to buff-colored belly. A single black stripe runs along the spine, and each side has two black stripes with a white stripe between them. Ears are short and rounded; eyes are ringed with white with a dark stripe through the center. The tail is somewhat flattened, shorter than the body, and furred but not bushy. Chipmunks have pouches inside their cheeks, which they use to carry food. They prefer deciduous woodlands, living mostly along the borders rather than deep in the forest. Tunnel systems with nest chambers are built in wooded banks, rocky ridges, stone and log piles, and rubbish heaps. Chipmunks may also live in human-built areas, using shrubs, stone walls, and old buildings. During winter, they stay in their burrows. Individuals display differing levels of hibernation and eat from their underground food caches when they are active. Usually each individual has its own tunnel system, but occasionally 3 or 4 may winter together. Chipmunks are known for their loud *chip* calls.

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide, but most common in the Ozarks.

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### Size:

**Total length:** 8-12 inches

**Tail:** 2½-4½ inches

**Weight:** 2-5 ounces

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**Diet:** Mainly seeds, nuts, and fruits. Perishable foods, such as berries and mushrooms, are eaten but not typically stored. Insects, worms, slugs, snails, young mice, small frogs and snakes, salamanders, young birds, and eggs are also eaten.

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# Southern Flying Squirrel

*Glaucomys volans*

**Missouri Distribution:**  
Statewide.

**About:** About the size of a chipmunk, the southern flying squirrel has large dark eyes, a slightly upturned nose, largish ears, soft gray fur on top, and white fur below. On each side, a flap of loose skin runs between its front and rear legs. It uses the flaps as wings to glide from tree to tree. Its tail — furred, somewhat broad, and horizontally flattened — serves as a rudder when the squirrel glides. This species prefers mature forests with many dead trees and snags with woodpecker holes. In Missouri, flying squirrels are most often found in oak-hickory forests. They nest in tree cavities and may also use bird houses and the attics or eaves of homes. In winter, several squirrels may live in the same nest. They do not hibernate but may refrain from going out during severe cold or ice. Strictly nocturnal, they are active throughout the night. They can be hard to spot in the dark, but their high-pitched calls may reveal their presence, although some of their calls are too high for humans to hear.

**Size:**

**Total length:** 8-11¼ inches

**Tail:** 3-5 inches

**Weight:** 1½-5 ounces

**Diet:** Nuts, fruits, berries, bark, leaf and flower buds, and mushrooms. They also may eat beetles, moths, other insects and larvae, bird eggs, nestlings, and carrion.



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# Woodchuck

## *Marmota monax*

**About:** The woodchuck, or groundhog, is a medium-sized, plump-looking rodent with short legs and a medium-long tail that is somewhat flattened and bushy. Its fur is fairly long and grayish brown in color with hues of red or yellow. Woodchucks live along the borders of woodlands near open land, along fencerows, or in gullies with dense vegetation. They dig burrows, often in sandy or rocky slopes. Adults often live singly, but a family or small group of woodchucks may occupy a system of burrows. They are considered true hibernators, wintering in their burrows in a deep sleep with slowed heartbeat, reduced breathing rate, and lowered body temperature. Young, usually 4 or 5, are born in late March and are rarely seen outside the burrow until they are 6 or 7 weeks old. Females generally do all the parenting, but some males will help after the young start venturing outside. The offspring begin moving away to dig their own homes in midsummer. Woodchucks are active during the day and can often be observed basking in the sun.

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide, but rare in the Mississippi lowlands where the water table is high and limits denning sites.

### Size:

**Total length:** 16-27 inches

**Tail:** 4-7 inches

**Weight:** 4-14 pounds

**Diet:** Leaves, flowers, grasses, clover, other herbaceous plants, and sometimes fruits, especially pawpaws and apples. Less than 1 percent of the diet is insects, snails, and (rarely) eggs of ground-nesting birds. Garden vegetables are a favorite item.



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# Plains Pocket Gopher

## *Geomys bursarius*



### Missouri Distribution:

Found across the northern half of the state and in east-central Missouri.

**About:** The plains pocket gopher is a small stocky rodent with a stout neck, broad head, short legs, and short tail, varying in color from light to dark brown or blackish on top, sometimes with white on the belly or throat. The claws on its front middle toes are long and sharp for digging. It has large, fur-lined cheek pouches, or pockets, that extend from the sides of the face near the mouth to the shoulders. Food and nest material are carried in these pockets. The gopher's mouth closes behind its front teeth, allowing it to dig soil or cut roots with its incisors without getting dirt inside its mouth. Plains pocket gophers live in open habitats, such as grasslands, prairies, pastures, meadows, and cultivated fields of clover or alfalfa, preferring areas with deep, moist soil. They build extensive underground tunnel systems with nest, bathroom, and food storage chambers. Gophers are solitary, each living in its own tunnels, but several may live near each other. They are most active at night, early morning, and late evening, and are rarely seen above ground.

### Size:

**Total length:** 7½-13¾ inches

**Tail:** 2-4½ inches

**Weight:** 5-18 ounces

**Diet:** Nearly fully vegetarian, eating roots, underground stems, green stems of grasses and legumes, small fruits, and grains. May store acorns and black walnuts. On rare occasions, may eat mice or a dead gopher.



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# American Beaver

## *Castor canadensis*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The American beaver is the largest rodent in North America. It has small eyes, small ears, brown fur, webbed hind feet, and a flattened tail that is relatively hairless and covered with leathery skin. The tail serves as a rudder when beavers swim, provides balance when they walk, stores fat, and supports them when they are cutting trees. When danger is near, beavers slap their tails on the surface of water to alert other beavers to the threat. They fell trees by standing on their hind feet and gnawing around the trunks with their large front teeth. Beavers live in and along rivers, streams, small lakes, and marshes. They may den in lodges made from twigs and tree limbs, but in Missouri, with our fast and fluctuating streams, they usually dig a den in a high bank. Dams are built with tree branches, mud, stones, and sod. Beavers live in family units of two parents, their yearling offspring, and the current year's kits. They are most active at night but may be out during the day in remote areas.

### Size:

**Total length:** 34-54 inches

**Tail:** 9-17 inches

**Weight:** 26-90 pounds

**Diet:** In summer, mostly nonwoody plants, such as pond lilies, watercress, bur reed, arrowhead, and small land plants and shrubs. In winter, mostly woody plants — mainly the bark of young twigs and the cambium layer of trees (the new growth under the bark).



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# Common Muskrat

*Ondatra zibethicus*

**Missouri Distribution:**  
Statewide.

**About:** In some ways, the common muskrat is similar to a beaver, but it's more closely related to mice and rats. This medium-sized rodent has a stocky body, small eyes and ears, blackish brown fur, and a narrow, vertically flattened, scaly tail. Unlike beavers, muskrats do not have webbed feet. Both males and females have a musk gland that produces a mild odor. Muskrats spend a lot of time in the water and live in wetlands, streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes. They dig dens in the banks of rivers and streams or build huts made of vegetation in shallow water. Generally nocturnal, they may be active during the day.

**Size:**

**Total length:** 16–25 inches

**Tail:** 7–11 inches

**Weight:** 1½–4 pounds

**Diet:** Varies depending on location. In marshes, they eat roots, cattail stems, bulrushes, lotus seeds; in the Ozarks, snails, crayfish, fish, frogs, freshwater clams, and aquatic plants; in other areas, white clover, corn, and bluegrass.



NOPPADOL PACITHONG

# Beaver/Muskrat/Nutria

*Look for key identifying features to tell these similar species apart.*

## **Beaver:**

- Large, horizontally flattened, scaly tail
- Hind feet are webbed
- 26-90 pounds
- Largest rodent in the U.S.



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## **Muskrat:**

- Narrow, vertically flattened, scaly tail
- Tail moves in a snakelike pattern when swimming
- Hind feet slightly webbed
- 1½-4 pounds
- Smaller than beaver and nutria



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## **Nutria (invasive species):**

- Round, scaly tail
- Tail trails smoothly behind it when swimming
- White whiskers may be seen from a distance
- Hind feet are webbed between the first 4 toes
- 15-25 pounds
- Smaller than a beaver, larger than a muskrat



Learn more about nutria at [short.mdc.mo.gov/oT4](http://short.mdc.mo.gov/oT4)

# Mice/Voles/Shrews

*Look for key identifying features to tell these small mammals apart.*

## **Mice:**

- Large ears
- Black, bulging eyes
- Long tail



## **Voles:**

- Smaller ears
- Smaller eyes
- Blunt nose
- Shorter tail
- Rounded, stocky body



## **Shrews:**

- Ears hidden in fur
- Tiny eyes
- Pointed snout
- Velvety fur
- Tail may be short or long depending on the species



# Western Harvest Mouse

## *Reithrodontomys megalotis*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The western harvest mouse is a small rodent that is mostly brown with black-tipped hairs, grayish tan on its sides, and white on the belly and feet. It has large eyes and ears; its tail is somewhat furred and scaly. Harvest mice live in meadows, prairies, abandoned fields, fencerows, weedy roadsides, and the edges of marshes with thick cover. Nests are woven from plant materials and used all year. Each nest is usually home to one male and one female. They may have up to 7 litters each year, averaging 3 to 5 young per litter. Harvest mice are active both day and night but feed the most between sunset and midnight.

Two other species of harvest mice live in portions of southern Missouri; all three species are difficult to distinguish from each other. The plains harvest mouse (*R. montanus*) has been found in a few counties of southwest Missouri along the Kansas border, and the fulvous harvest mouse (*R. fulvescens*) is found in the southern third of the state but not the far southeastern counties.

### Size:

**Total length:** 4–6½ inches

**Tail:** 2–3¼ inches

**Weight:** ⅓–½ ounce

**Diet:** Mainly seeds from grasses and legumes; occasionally shoots, leaves, flowers, fruits, and insects.



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# Deer Mouse

## *Peromyscus maniculatus*

**Missouri Distribution:**  
Statewide.

**About:** The deer mouse is a small rodent with large, dark eyes; long whiskers; and large ears that are sparsely furred. Its body fur is grayish to reddish brown on top and white to grayish on the underparts and lower face. The feet are white. The tail is covered with thin fur and has a small tuft on the end. Deer mice prefer open habitats — meadows, pastures, prairies, agricultural fields — and often live in field borders and fencerows. Nests are usually below ground in cavities around roots, under logs or boards, or in a tunnel dug and vacated by other animals or made by the mouse itself. Deer mice live alone or in pairs during breeding season. For warmth in winter, as many as 15 may nestle together. A female may bear two or more litters in spring and again in fall, averaging 3 to 4 young per litter. Deer mice are most active at night.

Three other *Peromyscus* species live in Missouri: the white-footed mouse (*P. leucopus*) is found statewide, the cotton mouse (*P. gossypinus*) in extreme southeast Missouri, and the Texas mouse (*P. attwaterii*) in extreme southwestern Missouri. All look similar to the deer mouse and to each other.

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### Size:

**Total length:** 4½-8 inches

**Tail:** 1⅝-7⅞ inches

**Weight:** ⅓-1 ounce

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**Diet:** Insects (especially beetles and caterpillars), nuts, seeds, grain, fruits, some leaves; occasionally fungi, snails, slugs, worms, spiders, centipedes, millipedes, eggs, young birds, and dead mice.

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JIM RATHER

# Hispid Cotton Rat

## *Sigmodon hispidus*

**About:** The hispid cotton rat is a small rodent with coarse, longish fur that is a mix of brown, black, and tan on the back, and less black on the sides. Underneath it is whitish to grayish or buff. Its feet are gray to dark brown. The ears are relatively large but hidden in the fur. Hispid cotton rats live in thick, grassy fields, weedy roadsides, and the borders of agricultural fields. They create discernible runways in the grass, and build nests under rocks and logs or in the ground, using grass and other plant materials. In winter, they may nest above ground in a protected location. They do not hibernate or store food. Males and females maintain separate territories, but during winter several individuals will huddle together for warmth. Hispid cotton rats are active day and night, but most active after dark.

### Missouri Distribution:

Found in about two-thirds of the state, mostly south of the Missouri River.

### Size:

**Total length:** 8-14½ inches

**Tail:** 3-6½ inches

**Weight:** 2-8 ounces

**Diet:** Leaves, stems, roots, and seeds of sedges and grasses; fruits, vegetables, cotton, wheat, and other cultivated plants; insects, crayfish, eggs and nestlings of ground-nesting birds, carrion.



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# Eastern Woodrat

## *Neotoma floridana*

**About:** The eastern woodrat is a medium-small rodent that is brownish gray on its back, lighter brown on the sides, and white on its belly, throat, and feet. The tail is brownish black on top, white below, and fairly well-furred. It has conspicuous ears; bulging, black eyes; and long, noticeable whiskers. Eastern woodrats live in rocky, forested areas, and sometimes in swamps or open land. They build nests in caves or crevices of limestone bluffs and outcroppings, and may also nest in brush piles, trees, tangled vines, cutbanks along streams, and abandoned buildings. Their presence is often noticed because of their latrines: piles of small, oval droppings on the ground or brownish-black urine streaks in rocky areas. Nests are made from sticks, dried leaves and grass, and items such as bones, rocks, and bits of metal. Woodrats are sometimes called packrats because of their tendency to collect objects such as coins, buckles, bottle caps, and tin cans and bring them to their nests. They may also store food at the nest. Woodrats do not hibernate and are mostly active at night.

### **Missouri Distribution:**

South of the Missouri River, and counties that border the north side of the Missouri River.

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### **Size:**

**Total length:** 12¼-17 inches

**Tail:** 5-8 inches

**Weight:** 6-12 ounces

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**Diet:** Mostly buds, leaves, stems, roots, bark, seeds, fruits, and nuts. Fungi, and occasionally snails, insects, and dead birds may be eaten.

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# Voles

## *Microtus spp.*

**About:** Voles are mouse-like rodents with stocky bodies, rounded noses, and small ears that are mostly hidden in fur. They dig burrows and can close their lips behind their teeth to keep dirt out of their mouths while digging.

Often they create runways in grassy areas and travel along these routes between their burrows, remaining relatively unseen within the grass. Voles have short lifespans, can breed at a few months of age, and have many litters per year. Their populations may vary in size from year to year.

Missouri has three species of voles: meadow (*M. pennsylvanicus*), prairie (*M. ochrogaster*), and woodland (*M. pinetorum*). The meadow vole and prairie vole look very much alike. Biologists use differences in the teeth to confirm which is which. Both species inhabit grassy areas, with the meadow vole more likely to live in wetter locations. The woodland vole is smaller than the other two species. As the name implies, woodland voles live in wooded areas, preferring oak-hickory and mixed hardwood-pine forests.

### Missouri Distribution:

Meadow voles are the least abundant, found mainly north of the Missouri River. Prairie voles and woodland voles occur statewide.

### Size:

**Total length:** 3¼–7¾ inches

**Weight:** ¾–2 ounces

**Tail length from longest to shortest:**

Meadow vole: 1½–2½ inches

Prairie vole: 7⁄8–1⅞ inches

Woodland vole: 5⁄8–1 inch

**Diet:** Green stems, leaves, tubers, roots, flowers, seeds, fruits, and succulent plants; may eat insects, crayfish, snails, and mice.



Meadow vole

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# Southern Bog Lemming

## *Synaptomys cooperi*

**About:** The southern bog lemming is a small rodent with a thick body, large head, small eyes, short legs, and short tail. Its fur is brownish with a mix of gray, black, and yellow on top and dark gray underneath.

Its ears are mostly hidden by fur. Its lips close behind the front teeth to keep particles out of the mouth when the lemming is gnawing. Southern bog lemmings live in areas with dense bluegrass as well as swamps, bogs, and damp woods. They dig burrows, nesting underground in the winter but sometimes aboveground in summer. Like voles, they create a system of runways through the grasses that surround their burrows. Bog lemmings live in colonies that range from a few individuals to several dozen. They are active throughout the day and night and do not hibernate. Population sizes can vary greatly from year to year.

### Missouri Distribution:

Nearly statewide. Lemmings have not been found in the extreme southwestern counties of Missouri, but further studies may find them there as well.

### Size:

**Total length:** 3¼-6 inches

**Tail:** ½-1¼ inches

**Weight:** ½-2 ounces

**Diet:** Stems, leaves, grasses, grass seeds, white clover; sometimes fungi, moss, bark, beetles, and beetle larvae.



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# Eastern Mole

## *Scalopus aquaticus*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The eastern mole is a small mammal that spends its life tunneling underground. Its body is cylinder shaped and covered with velvety, silver-gray fur. Highly adapted for digging, its front feet are enlarged, very wide with strong claws, and often held vertically with soles pointing outward. Large front limb and chest bones anchor strong muscles, which, along with a specialized bone that attaches the feet to the wrist, aid in digging. Fused eyelids cover the mole's tiny, reduced eyes; a mole can only see light and dark. Its flexible snout detects not only odors but helps the mole navigate through touch. The short tail also senses touch and guides the mole when it moves backward. Moles dig a series of tunnels in meadows, pastures, open woodlands, lawns, and stream banks. They prefer loose, rich soil that is well-drained but moist, avoiding soil that can't support tunnel walls. Their tunnels are often used by mice, shrews, and other animals. Moles are solitary and seek others only during breeding season. They are active day and night, taking periodic breaks to rest.

### Size:

**Total length:** 5½–8 inches

**Tail:** ¾–1½ inches

**Weight:** 1–5 ounces

**Diet:** Earthworms, beetle grubs, ants, centipedes, millipedes, slugs, snails, spiders, sowbugs, other insects and their larvae. Grass seeds and grains are sometimes eaten.



JIM RATHERT

# Shrews

*Blarina, Cryptotis, and Sorex spp.*

**Missouri Distribution:**  
Statewide.

**About:** Shrews are tiny mammals, mouse-sized or smaller. They have short legs, a cylinder-shaped body, velvety fur, and a pointed snout that extends over the mouth. Their teeth are sharp and spiky with incisors that function as pincers for grasping insects. They have tiny eyes, ears mostly hidden by fur, and a flexible nose. Although they have poor vision, they have keen hearing and a well-developed sense of touch via their nose. Shrews often live under old logs, in mossy banks, or in leafy cover on the forest floor. They use tunnels, either those created by moles and other animals or they may dig their own. Shrews are highly active, energetic, nervous creatures. They must search for food nearly constantly to satisfy their high metabolisms. Some species eat their body weight (or more) in food every day.

Missouri has six species of shrews: three short-tailed shrews (northern [*Blarina brevicauda*], southern [*B. carolinensis*], and Elliot's [*B. hylophaga*]) and three others (least [*Cryptotis parva*], cinereus [*Sorex cinereus*], and southeastern [*S. longirostris*]). The saliva of short-tailed shrews contains venom that immobilizes insects and other prey.

## Size:

**Total length:** from 2½ inches (least shrew) to 5 inches (northern short-tailed shrew).

**Tail:** ½-1 inch (short-tailed shrews); ½-¾ inch (least shrew); 1-2 inches (cinereus); 1¼-1⅝ (southeastern).

**Weight:** from ⅙ ounce (least, cinereus, southeastern) to 1 ounce (short-tailed shrews).

**Diet:** Primarily insects; may also eat worms, snails, slugs, spiders, millipedes, centipedes; occasionally roots, nuts, fruits, berries, and fungi. Short-tailed shrews sometimes eat snakes, salamanders, birds, mice, other shrews.



Northern short-tailed shrew

JIM RATHER

# Red Fox

## *Vulpes vulpes*

**About:** The red fox has a doglike appearance with a long, pointed muzzle; pointed, upright ears; moderately long legs; and long, bushy tail. The pupils of foxes' eyes are vertically elliptical (oval), which differs from the round pupils of other canid species. The fur is long, thick, and soft, and typically is reddish yellow. The tail can have either a white or black tip, and the cheeks, throat, and belly are white. The lower legs and feet are black. Red foxes prefer the edges of woodlands and nearby open lands; they avoid dense forests. They sleep on the ground in a sheltered spot most of the year and use a den when they have young. A fox family usually consists of the two parents and that year's offspring; occasionally one or two unpaired adult females will help raise the young. Kits, or pups, are born in March or April. Litters average 4 to 7 but may be as large as 10 kits. At 8 to 10 weeks, kits start accompanying their parents on hunts. Red foxes communicate with a variety of yaps, barks, screeches, and yowls. They are most active at night but also come out during the day, especially at dawn or dusk.

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide, but more common in the northern and western portions of the state.

### Size:

**Total length:** 30–46 inches

**Tail:** 11½–22 inches

**Weight:** 7½–15 pounds

**Diet:** Mostly rabbits, mice, and rats. Other small mammals, wild birds, insects, and some plants (mostly persimmon fruits) may also be eaten.



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# Gray Fox

## *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide, but more common in the Ozarks.

**About:** The gray fox resembles the red fox in build but is slightly smaller, has coarser fur, and is grayish in overall color with a black-tipped tail. The cheeks and throat are white, while the chest, sides of the neck, belly, inside of the legs, backs of the ears, and the feet are reddish. Gray foxes live in areas that provide both forest and grassland, but generally avoid heavily agricultural landscapes. They use dens more than red foxes do; the dens may be in hollow logs or trees, rock piles, or an underground burrow. Unlike most canids, gray foxes have curved claws that allow them to climb trees, grasping the trunk with their front feet while pushing themselves up with their hind feet. In trees, they sun, eat fruits, and escape from dogs or coyotes. Young are born from March to mid-May, with most litters containing 3 to 5 pups. Gray foxes growl, squeal, and chuckle, and have a yapping bark that is louder and harsher than that of the red fox. They may be seen in the day but are most active at night.

### Size:

**Total length:** 31¼-44 inches

**Tail:** 8½-17 inches

**Weight:** 5-15½ pounds

**Diet:** Mainly rabbits, mice, and rats; other small mammals, wild birds, insects, and fruits are eaten in lesser quantities.



NOFPADOL PACITHONG

# Coyote

## *Canis latrans*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The coyote is a medium-sized member of the dog family. Its back, sides, and tail are light gray to yellowish tan, with outer hairs tipped in black. The front legs are whitish; the belly and throat are white to pale gray. Individual coloration can vary; occasionally melanistic (black) coyotes are seen. Coyotes live in brushy areas, along forest edges, and in open farmlands. Most of the year, they sleep on the ground in a protected spot, but they use dens for raising young pups. Coyotes may live singly, as a male and female pair, or in a family group. Young are born in late April to May. Litters average from 5 to 7 pups a year. Both parents care for the young. Some pairs mate for life; others for only one year. Coyotes communicate with one another via facial expressions, body postures, and a variety of vocalizations, including yips, barks, whimpers, and howls. They are most active from dusk to dawn and occasionally are out during the day.

### Size:

**Total length:** 39-54 inches

**Tail:** 10-16 inches

**Weight:** 18-30 pounds

**Diet:** Rabbits and mice account for a large portion of the diet. Coyotes may also eat birds, carrion, insects, fruits, and plants.



NOPPADOL PAOHONG

# American Black Bear

## *Ursus americanus*



### Missouri Distribution:

Most live south of the Missouri River but individuals have been seen as far north as the Iowa border. Missouri's bear population was nearly extirpated in the early 1900s but has been growing in recent decades, in part due to population recovery work in Arkansas in the 1960s.

**About:** One of Missouri's largest and heaviest mammals, the American black bear has a long muzzle, rounded ears, stout legs, and a short tail that may be hard to see against its heavy fur. Short, pointy claws make them adept at climbing trees.

Mostly black in color, these bears have a brown muzzle and, sometimes, a white patch on the chest. In Missouri, black bears can also have blonde, brown, or reddish-brown fur. Black bears prefer to live in forested habitats. In fall, they consume extra food to gain weight before seeking a den to hibernate for winter. They den in caves, hollow trees, rock crevices, leaf or brush piles, and other small, sheltered areas. Cubs are born in late winter while the female is still denning. Two cubs per year is the average, but 1 to 4 cubs are possible. Cubs remain with their mother through the following winter and disperse as yearlings. Black bears move and feed throughout the day but are most active in morning and evening.

### Size:

**Total length:** 46-78 inches

**Tail:** 4-5 inches

**Weight:** 86-600 pounds. Adult males may weigh up to twice as much as adult females.

**Diet:** A wide variety of plants and animals, including grasses, forbs, fruits, acorns, insects, fish, frogs, small mammals, bird eggs, and carrion.



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# Bobcat

## *Lynx rufus*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The bobcat is larger than a house cat but smaller than a mountain lion. It has long legs and a short tail. Its fur is yellowish tan to reddish brown, with small black spots. Occasionally bobcats may be all black. The backs of the ears have a white spot; some individuals have ear tufts. Bobcats prefer forested areas interspersed with underbrush, clearings, glades, and rocky outcrops; however, they are highly adaptive and may live in many landscapes, even near towns and cities. Bobcats and their dens tend to have a strong odor. Generally solitary, adults do not interact with each other outside of breeding season. Females raise the kittens (usually 2 to 3 per litter). Young are born in spring and stay with their mother until fall or later. Bobcats may be active day or night but hunt mostly at dawn and dusk. Although secretive and quiet, they may growl or give high-pitched shrieks.

### Size:

**Total length:** 18½-50 inches

**Tail:** 3½-8 inches

**Weight:** 10-40 pounds. Males can be considerably larger than females.

**Diet:** Mainly small mammals such as mice, rats, squirrels, and rabbits. They sometimes eat birds or reptiles, and occasionally take deer.



JIM RATHERT

# Mountain Lion / Bobcat / House Cat

*Although no mountain lions currently breed in Missouri, some do pass through the state each year. Many reports of mountain lions turn out to be bobcats, and sometimes even house cats. Learn which identifying features to look for to tell these felines apart.*



DAVID STONNER

When people report mountain lion sightings with an unclear photo, MDC staff bring cardboard cutouts of the three cat species to the photo location and place them against the photo's background to help determine the size of the animal in the original photo.

## Mountain Lion:



- Long tail
- Uniform color
- 90-160 pounds
- 25-30 inches at shoulder

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## Bobcat:

- Short tail
- Spotted and streaked fur
- 10-40 pounds
- 16-24 inches at shoulder

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## House Cat:

- Long tail (usually), but may be bobbed
- Many colors and fur patterns
- 8-20 pounds
- 8-12 inches at shoulder

# Raccoon

## *Procyon lotor*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The raccoon is a medium-sized mammal, with a stocky body, a broad head, and a pointed nose. Its fur is a mix of black, gray, and brown, with white on the face and an unmistakable black mask over the eyes. The tail is thickly furred and marked with four to seven dark rings. Raccoons prefer wooded habitat near water. Many have adapted well to urban and suburban areas. They den in hollow trees or logs, caves, rocky crevices, squirrel nests, muskrat houses, abandoned buildings, and many other places. Adults tend to be solitary, but during severe cold, several may den together. Young are usually born in April and May and stay with their mothers until the fall or the following spring. Raccoons are excellent climbers and also swim well. They walk with a lumbering gait. They are most active at night but may be seen during daylight on occasion.

### Size:

**Total length:** 21½–38 inches

**Tail:** 5½–12 inches

**Weight:** 6–25 pounds

**Diet:** Plants and animals, including fruits, berries, acorns, pecans, other nuts, corn, grasses, sedges, insects, spiders, earthworms, crayfish, frogs, reptiles, bird nestlings and eggs, mice, squirrels, rabbits.



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# American Badger

## *Taxidea taxus*



### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide, where sandier soils are found.

**About:** The American badger is a medium-sized mammal with a squat, stocky body. It has a broad head, short ears, a short neck, short legs, and a short, furry tail. Its overall color is grayish with brown, tan, or yellow tones. Its face has a black and white pattern with a white stripe running from the top of the head to the nose, white on the cheeks extending upwards toward the ear, and a black patch in front of each ear. Long claws on the front feet are used for digging. Badgers prefer open areas such as prairies, grasslands, fields, and pastures, and they den in shallow burrows. They are exceptional diggers, digging faster than their burrowing prey, sometimes kicking dirt as high as 5 feet into the air behind them. Badgers are solitary and most active at night.

### Size:

**Total length:** 26–35 inches

**Tail:** 4–7 inches

**Weight:** 13–30 pounds. Males are heavier than females.

**Diet:** Ground squirrels, mice, rabbits, insects, lizards, snakes, bird eggs, and reptile eggs.



# Least Weasel

## *Mustela nivalis*



### Missouri Distribution:

Present in northern counties of the state. Missouri is at the southern edge of the species' overall range.

**About:** The least weasel is a small, slender mammal with a long body, short legs, and short, furred tail. In summer, adults are brown with white on the chin, underside, and toes. In winter, the color can vary from brown to nearly all white. Least weasels live in areas with short vegetation, including pastures, fields with agricultural stubble, marshy areas, and sometimes buildings overrun with rodents. The key habitat factor for them is that prey must be numerous. This species dens in the former burrows of moles and pocket gophers, lining them with grasses, corn silk, and mouse fur. Individuals are solitary except during breeding season. To meet their high-energy demands, least weasels eat more than half their body weight daily — an average of 1 to 1½ mice per day.

### Size:

**Total length:** 5¾-9¾ inches

**Tail:** ¾-1½ inches

**Weight:** 1¼-2 ounces. Males can be considerably larger than females.

**Diet:** Mainly mice and other small rodents, but insects and small birds may be eaten when available.



# Long-Tailed Weasel

## *Mustela frenata*



### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide, most common in southcentral and southwestern parts of the state.

**About:** The long-tailed weasel has a slim, elongated body; short legs; and a long, furred tail. In summer, the upper parts are brown, the underside is yellowish, and the chin is white. The tail is brown with black at the tip. During winter in Missouri, the coat usually becomes a paler brown, but some individuals may turn white, except for black at the end of the tail. Long-tailed weasels live in many habitats but prefer woodlands, brushy fencerows, and thickets near waterways. They den in shallow burrows, often the former homes of moles, mice, or ground squirrels. They may also use rock piles, cavities under tree roots, or dense brush. Weasels are quick and agile, which aids in taking prey. More than running or walking, long-tailed weasels tend to lope along with an arched back and extended tail. They are more active at night but also hunt during the day.

### Size:

**Total length:** 11½-17½ inches

**Tail:** 3-6¼ inches

**Weight:** 2½-9½ ounces. Males can be significantly larger than females.

**Diet:** Mainly small mammals such as mice, rats, squirrels, rabbits, shrews, and moles; occasionally birds, reptiles, amphibians, eggs, worms, and insects.



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# American Mink

## *Neogale vison*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The American mink is a medium-sized mammal with a long slender body, short legs, and furred tail. It is brown with a white chin and may have irregular white spots on the throat, chest, and belly. As a member of the weasel family, the mink has a pair of musk glands that emit a strong odor. Minks live along rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds, often with woods nearby. They den in bank cavities, under tree roots, in logs and hollow trees, and in muskrat burrows or lodges. Individuals travel widely and will use many different dens over the course of a month. Minks move adeptly both on land and in water. They often raise up on their hind legs to view their surroundings and may climb trees to evade predators. Agile underwater, they readily chase and capture fish. Minks live alone except when raising young. A male may mate with several females but usually stays with the last one to help care for the kits. Minks are most active at night.

### Size:

**Total length:** 16-27 inches

**Tail:** 5-9 inches

**Weight:** 1¼-3¼ pounds. Males are heavier than females.

**Diet:** Mice, rabbits, other small mammals, birds, eggs, frogs, fish, crayfish, and other aquatic animals.



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# North American River Otter

## *Lontra canadensis*

**Missouri Distribution:**  
Statewide.

**About:** Long and cylinder-shaped, otters are built for swimming. Their bodies are streamlined, their feet are webbed, and their tail is long and tapered. They are covered in dense, oily fur that can be as thick as half a million hairs per square inch. Regular preening traps air between the hairs, helping to insulate against water temperatures. When underwater, their ears and nose close to keep water out. Otters live along streams, rivers, and lakes. They den in burrows in banks, under large tree roots, beneath rocky ledges, under fallen trees, or below thickets. Considered semi-social, otters often live in family groups year-round. They may be active during the day but are mostly nocturnal. Otters exhibit playful behaviors and have been observed sliding down slopes and tossing rocks into the water and diving after them.

### Size:

**Total length:** 35½-53 inches

**Tail:** 12-19 inches

**Weight:** 10-30 pounds. Males are larger than females.

**Diet:** Fish, frogs, mussels, crayfish, aquatic insects, and other small animals.



# Striped Skunk

## *Mephitis mephitis*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** The striped skunk is a medium-sized mammal with a fluffy, long-haired tail. It has black fur, usually with a white stripe running lengthwise on the back of the head and neck that then splits into two stripes, one on each side of the body. Stripe size varies by individual; some skunks have very thin white stripes while the backs of others may be entirely white. The tail is mostly black but may have an extension of the white stripes as well as a white tip. Striped skunks live in a variety of habitats but prefer forest borders, brushy fields, fencerows, and open grassy fields with wooded ravines, rocky outcrops, and a water source nearby. They usually den in the ground but may use hollow logs, brush piles, wood piles, caves, crevices, or the space under buildings. When provoked, a skunk may spray a thick, oily, foul-smelling liquid from scent glands at the base of the tail. However, it usually gives a warning by stomping its feet, growling, hissing, or raising its tail and sprays only if the threat persists. Skunks are most active at night.

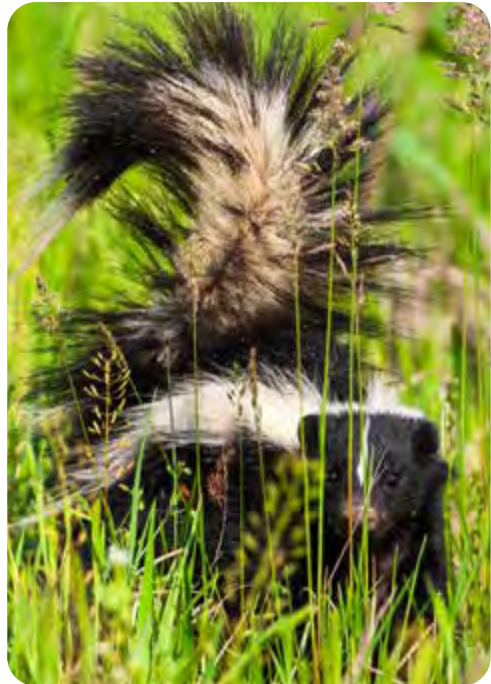
### Size:

**Total length:** 20–30 inches

**Tail:** 7–15 inches

**Weight:** 2½–11½ pounds.  
Males are heavier than females.

**Diet:** In spring and summer, insects are a chief part of the diet. Worms, mice, moles, shrews, other small mammals, carrion, and (less often) birds, bird eggs, frogs, lizards, crayfish, and minnows are eaten. Fruits are eaten in season as well as grasses, leaves, buds, roots, nuts, grains, and fungi.



NOPPADOL PAOHONG

# Plains Spotted Skunk

## *Spilogale interrupta*



### Missouri Distribution:

Small populations scattered throughout the state.

**About:** The plains spotted skunk is a medium-sized, slender mammal with short legs and a long-haired tail.

It is black overall with white stripes and spots. A white spot is found on the forehead and in front of each ear. The tail is usually all black, sometimes with a white tip. These skunks will inhabit prairies, brushy areas, and cultivated land, but in Missouri they are more frequently found in wooded areas of the Ozarks where there is leaf litter and downed logs. They den underground as well as aboveground in haystacks, wood piles, hollow logs, or brush heaps. Spotted skunks are skilled tree climbers. As a warning to predators, they do front handstands or stomp their front feet, only spraying fluid from their scent glands as a last resort. The scent of spotted skunks is stronger than that of striped skunks. They are secretive and most active at night.

### Size:

**Total length:** 14–24 inches

**Tail:** 4½–11 inches

**Weight:** ¾–2¾ pounds. Males are heavier than females.

**Diet:** Insects (especially grasshoppers, crickets, and beetles) and mice are their main food. Small rodents, rabbits, carrion, birds, eggs, crayfish, salamanders, reptiles, fruits, and fungi may also be consumed.



BLAKE SASSE, ARKANSAS GAME AND FISH COMMISSION

# White-Tailed Deer

## *Odocoileus virginianus*

### Missouri Distribution:

Statewide.

**About:** One of Missouri's largest mammals, white-tailed deer are hoofed animals that have a reddish-brown to tan coat in spring and summer that is replaced by a grayish-brown coat in winter. Their name comes from the white underside of their tails, which they raise as a flag to alert other deer to danger. Fawns have white spots that fade away at 3 to 4 months. Males (bucks) grow antlers that are shed each year. White-tailed deer prefer forests, woodlands, and open areas with grasses and broad-leaved plants, often using forest edges. In agricultural areas, they are often seen in crop fields near wooded areas. Bucks and does (females) tend to live in separate groups outside of the fall breeding season. Deer have a wide range of vocalizations, including high-pitched snorts when startled. They can run up to 35 mph and can jump up to 7 feet high. They are most active at dawn and dusk.

### Size:

**Total length:** ~6 feet

**Tail:** ~8 inches

**Weight:** 110-145 pounds (females); 155-195 pounds (males).

**Diet:** Leaves, twigs, fruits, and nuts of trees and shrubs; herbaceous plants; succulent grasses; agricultural crops; and occasionally fungi, mosses, and lichens.



NOPPADOLPAOHONG

# Elk

## *Cervus canadensis*



**Missouri Distribution:** Portions of Carter, Reynolds, and Shannon counties. Elk were extirpated from Missouri in the 1880s due to unregulated harvest. In 2011, efforts to restore elk to a portion of the Missouri Ozarks began. The restoration has been successful, and a limited number of permits are available each year for Missourians to hunt elk.

**About:** Elk are the second largest member of the deer family and the largest mammal found in Missouri. Tan in color, they have a thick neck, slender legs, long face, and large ears. Their rumps are cream colored, tails are short and tan, and both males (bulls) and females (cows) have dark brown, shaggy manes around the neck. Bulls grow antlers that are larger than those of a white-tailed deer and, unlike whitetail antlers, elk antlers are angled backward rather than forward. Young elk (calves) have spots until they are 3 to 5 months old. Elk live in woodlands with meadows and pastures. Bulls and cows live in separate groups most of the year, but during breeding season they form harems, with one bull and from 2 to 25 cows, plus their calves. Bull elk “bugle” in the fall, giving a high-pitched whistle-like sound followed by grunts. Elk also mew and bark, and the joints in their front legs make cracking sounds when they walk, keeping members of the herd in contact as they move through thick vegetation.

### Size:

**Total length:** 7-9 feet

**Tail:** 2-4 inches

**Weight:** 500-830 pounds. Females are smaller than males.

**Diet:** Grasses, forbs, twigs, bark, and leaves, with amounts of each changing according to season. Elk also eat acorns when available.



DAVID STONNER

# MAMMAL TRACKS

Often, although the actual animal may not be seen, its presence in an area may be revealed by its tracks or other telltale signs, such as scat or rub marks on trees. The ability to identify and read animal signs can be developed with practice, and many full-length books that teach this skill have been written. Here, we offer a few pointers to get you started by learning the shapes of common mammal tracks.

When you find a track, note:

- Track shape and size
- Pad marks
- Claw marks
- Number of toes per foot
- Hoof shape
- Marks made by fur or toe webbing
- Marks made by a dragging tail

If it's hard to see the complete footprint, look at the track from different angles, as the change in lighting or shadows may help reveal the track more fully. Measure the track or take a photo with a known object to help indicate relative size.

Also note the average distance between the prints, and the overall pattern of the tracks. Are all the prints in a fairly straight line? Does the animal appear to have walked, or waddled, or hopped from place to place? As you become more advanced, these details and others will help you tell similar tracks apart and perhaps tell a story about what the animal has been doing.

For more information on mammal tracks, visit [short.mdc.mo.gov/Ztw](http://short.mdc.mo.gov/Ztw). Scroll down to "Tracks by Species" for links to individual species in the online *Field Guide*, where you will find more details about their tracks.



JIM RATHER



CLIFF WHITE



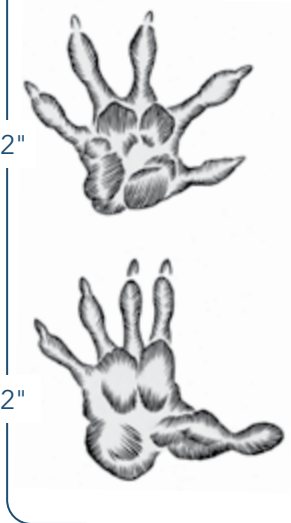
MARK SULLIVAN

These illustrations show the front track above the hind track. In the field, the tracks may not always line up this way. Track patterns will vary depending on how the animal is moving (walking, trotting, running, etc.). Sometimes the hind track will be above or overlap the front track. This happens because as an animal moves forward, the rear foot is set down in front of the track that was just made by the front foot.

**Nine-banded armadillo**



**Virginia opossum**



**Eastern cottontail**



**Eastern gray and eastern fox squirrels**

Gray squirrel tracks tend to be slightly smaller than fox squirrel tracks.



**Woodchuck**



**American beaver**



**Common muskrat**



**Red fox**



**Gray fox**



**Coyote**



**American black bear**



**Bobcat**



**House cat**



**Mountain lion**



**Raccoon**



**American badger**



**Weasel**



**American mink**

1"



1-2"



**North American river otter**

2½"



2½-3"



**Striped skunk**

1¾"



2¾"

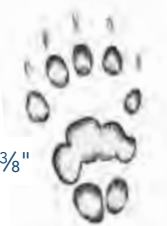


**Plains spotted skunk**

1-1½"



¾-1⅜"



**Elk**

3½-5"



3½-5"



Front track is slightly larger than the hind.

**White-tailed deer**

2½-4"



2½-4"



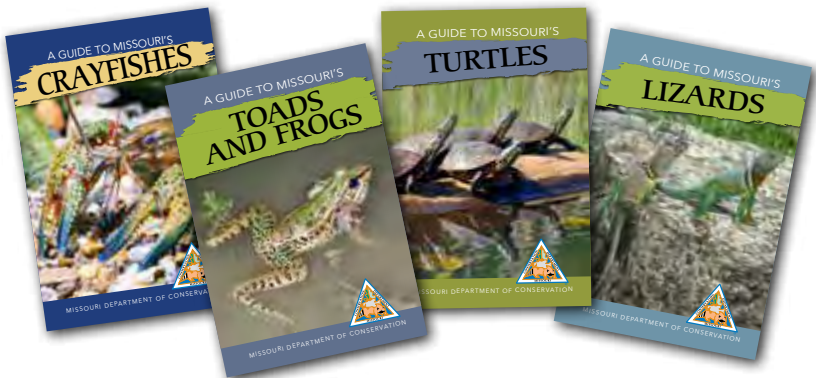
Front track is larger than the hind.



More details about Missouri's mammals  
can be found in MDC's  
online Field Guide at  
[mdc.mo.gov/field-guide](http://mdc.mo.gov/field-guide).

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For other free guides and publications about  
Missouri's wildlife, visit [short.mdc.mo.gov/4Y6](http://short.mdc.mo.gov/4Y6).





NOIPR/DOL/PACHONG

Raccoon



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