

Critters of Michigan



Pocket Guide to Animals in Your State

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produced in cooperation with Wildlife Forever

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How to Use This Guide

This book is your introduction to some of the wonderful critters found in Michigan; it includes 25 mammals, 29 birds, and 9 reptiles and amphibians. It includes some animals you probably already know, such as deer and American Robins, but others you may not know about, such as Hognose Snakes or Sandhill Cranes. We've selected the species in this book because they are widespread (Downy Woodpecker, page 92), abundant (White-tailed Deer, page 56), or well known (Moose, page 40) but rare.

The book is organized by type of animals: mammals, birds, and reptiles and amphibians. Within each section, the animals are in alphabetical order. If you'd like to look for a critter quickly, turn to the checklist (page 140), which you can also use to keep track of how many animals you've seen! For each species, you'll see a photo of the animal, along with neat facts and information on the animal's habitat, diet, its predators, how it raises its young, and more.

Safety Note

Nature can be unpredictable, so don't go outdoors alone, and always tell an adult if you're going outside. All wild animals should be treated with respect. If you see one—big or small—don't get close to it or attempt to touch or feed it. Instead, keep your distance and enjoy spotting it. If you can, snap some pictures with a camera or make a quick drawing using a sketchbook. If the animal is getting too close, is acting strangely, or seems sick or injured, tell an adult right away, as it might have rabies, a disease that can affect mammals. The good news is there's a rabies vaccine, so it's important to visit a doctor right away if you get bit or scratched by a wild animal.



Did you know?

The Eastern Cottontail gets its name from its short, puffy tail that looks like a cotton ball. A cottontail can travel up to 18 miles per hour! Rabbits have great hearing and eyesight. They can almost see all the way around them (360 degrees). On days with high wind, they will bed down in a burrow because the wind interferes with their ability to hear and detect predators.

Size Comparison



Most Active



Track Size





Eastern Cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus

Size: 16–19 inches long; weighs 1½–4 pounds

Habitat: Forests, swamps, orchards, deserts, and farm areas

Range: Found throughout Michigan; through the eastern US to Arizona and New Mexico; isolated ranges in the Pacific Northwest

Food: Clovers; grasses; wild strawberries; garden plants; and twigs of a variety of trees, including maple, oak, and sumac

Den: Rabbits don't dig dens; they bed in shallow, grassy, saucer-shaped depressions (holes) or under shrubs. They will sometimes use wood-chuck dens in the winter.

Young: They usually have 2–4 kits at one time, but it's not uncommon to have 7 or more. Born naked and blind, they weigh about an ounce (about the same weight as a slice of bread) and gain weight very quickly.

Predators: Owls, weasels, humans, and foxes

Tracks: The front foot is an inch long with four toe pads; the hind foot is 3½ inches long.

An Eastern Cottontail sports thick brown fur with a white belly, a gray rump, and a white “cotton” tail. During the winter, it survives by eating bark off of fruit trees and shrubs.





Did you know?

All wolves in the United States (except the Red Wolf in the Southeast) are Gray Wolves! Each area has its own subspecies (a group that is a little different physically or genetically), and their common names are often based on their habitat. Gray Wolves are often referred to as Timberwolves.

Size Comparison



Most Active



Track Size





Gray Wolf

Canis lupus

Size: 5–6½ feet long; weighs 60–130 pounds

Habitat: Forests and grasslands

Range: Throughout the upper peninsula of Michigan and the Isle Royale National Park; wolves patrol territories that are 25–150 square miles.

Food: Deer; moose; elk; and smaller animals like rabbits, beavers, and birds. Sometimes wolves feed young (or pups) vegetation, such as blueberries.

Den: For the first couple of weeks, the alpha (lead) female stays with the pups to keep them warm and fed. During this time, she is totally dependent on the remainder of the pack to provide her with food. Once the pups are large enough to be alone, the female can leave them and hunt to support the growing pack.

Young: Pups are born in April or May; 4 to 7 pups are born at one time; they stay in the den for 6–8 weeks and eventually leave the pack at 1–2 years of age.

Predators: Bears, other wolves, coyotes (which prey on young wolves), and humans

Tracks: Front paws are around 5 inches long; hind paws are 4 inches long; both front and hind paws have a width of 3 to 3½ inches.

Gray Wolves can be gray, black, or even red. Wolves live in groups called packs. Packs can be as small as 2 wolves and as large as 13 or more. Wolves will hunt in packs; when hunts are successful, the whole pack will feed on the kill, with the alpha eating first.





Did you know?

The Bald Eagle is an endangered species success story! The Bald Eagle was once endangered due to a pesticide called DDT that weakened eggshells and caused them to crack early. Through the banning of DDT and other conservation efforts, the Bald Eagle population recovered, and it was removed from the Endangered Species List in July of 2007.

Nest Type





Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Size: 3½ feet long; wingspan of 6½–8 feet; weighs 8–14 pounds

Habitat: Forests and tree stands (small forests) near river edges, lakes, seashores, and wetlands

Range: They are a resident bird throughout Michigan; they are found throughout much of the US.

Food: Fish, waterfowl (ducks), rabbits, squirrels, muskrats, and deer carcasses; will steal food from other eagles or osprey

Nesting: Eagles have lifelong partners that begin nesting in early fall.

Nest: They build a large nest at the tops of trees out of sticks; the nest can be over 5 feet wide and over 6 feet tall, often shaped like an upside-down cone.

Eggs: 1–3 white eggs

Young: Young (chicks) will hatch around 35 days; young will leave the nest around 12 weeks. It takes up to 5 years for eagles to get that iconic look!

Predators: Few; collisions with cars sometimes occur.

Migration: They are short-distance migrators, usually to coastal areas; in Michigan, many eagles do not migrate at all nor do they leave the state.

Adult Bald Eagles have a dark-brown body, a white head and tail, and a golden-yellow beak. Juvenile eagles are dark brown with a couple of white feathers on the wings and tail. A Bald Eagle can use its wings as oars to propel itself across bodies of water.



Did you know?

Blue Jays can mimic; they have been known to copy human speech and often fool birders by mimicking hawks. Blue Jays get the name “jay” from their nosy and rambunctious personality. Sometimes Blue Jays will mimic hawk calls to scare birds into dropping food. Other possible explanations include using the call to warn other birds that a hawk may be nearby.

Nest Type





Blue Jay

Cyanocitta cristata

Size: 11–12½ inches long; wingspan of 16 inches; weighs 2½–3½ ounces

Habitat: Forests and forest edges, suburban areas, city parks, and farm fields

Range: They can be found throughout the state of Michigan; their range extends from northeastern through central Canada and the edges of southwestern states like Arizona and Nebraska.

Food: Acorns, seeds, insects, fruits, eggs, nuts, and other birds after they die

Nesting: March to July

Nest: The gathering of nesting materials and the building of nests are shared by both male and female; a cup-shaped nest is built in the fork of tree branches.

Eggs: 4–5 eggs that are either blue or light brown and speckled with brown spots

Young: Chicks hatch naked with eyes closed around 17 days after eggs are laid. Nestlings are cared for by both parents and usually leave the nest 17–20 days after hatching.

Predators: Snakes, crows, falcons, owls, cats, raccoons, and hawks

Migration: Most stay in the area they are found in, but some will migrate south.

The Blue Jay's upper body feathers are made up of different shades of blue and black, and it has a blue crest (feathers on its head); the underbody is white or gray. A Blue Jay can hold food items with its feet and use its beak to open them. Sometimes they will store food for later.



Did you know?

Leopards are used by humans in many ways, including research for medical projects, as well as serving as specimens for biology courses. During the winter, they will hibernate underwater in ponds that have lots of oxygen and do not freeze.

Most Active





Northern Leopard Frog

Lithobates pipiens

Size: 2½–4½ inches long; weighs ½–3 ounces

Habitat: Meadows, open fields, lakes, forest edges, and ponds

Range: They are found throughout Michigan; there are strong populations into Canada and throughout the north-eastern states to Iowa, with populations extending into northern California, the Pacific Northwest, and the Southwest.

Food: Spiders, worms, insects, and other invertebrates like crustaceans and mollusks

Mating: Late March to early June; mating occurs in water.

Nest: No nest is constructed; within 3 days of mating, the female will lay eggs in permanent shallow bodies of water attached to vegetation just below the surface.

Eggs: A few hundred to 7,000 or more eggs are laid in one egg mass that is 2–5 inches wide.

Young: Tadpoles hatch after about 2–3 weeks of being laid and then complete the metamorphic cycle to become frogs in around 3 months. They reach reproductive maturity in the first or second year for males and within 2–3 years for females.

Predators: Fish, frogs, herons, snakes, hawks, gulls, mink, turtles, and dragonfly larvae

The Northern Leopard Frog is a smooth-skinned frog with 2–3 rows of dark spots with a lighter outline around them, atop a brown or green base layer. It has a ridge that extends from the base of the eye to the rear of the frog's bum. They have a white underside. Juveniles (young) will use streams and drainage ditches with vegetation to reach seasonal habitats.

Get to Know the Wild Side of Michigan!



Learn about 63 of Michigan's most important birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The *Critters of Michigan* wildlife pocket guide is informative, concise, and easy to use. Each species is showcased with a professional-quality photograph that's paired with neat-to-know details like habitat, range, and a "Did You Know?" set of facts.

Book Features

- 63 critters—only Michigan animals
- Full-color photographs of every species
- Concise descriptions and interesting facts
- Attractive layout with kid appeal

About the Author

Alex Troutman is a fish and wildlife biologist and an environmental educator. He is the co-organizer for several Black in X weeks, and he takes part in movements that encourage diversity in nature and STEAM fields, in the celebration of Black individual scientists, and in increasing awareness of Black nature enthusiasts.

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book benefits the conservation efforts of Wildlife Forever.

PUBLICATIONS
Adventure
an imprint of AdventureKEEN

JUVENILE NONFICTION / NATURE / MICHIGAN

ISBN 978-1-64755-351-7



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