

# Critters of Georgia



## 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 Georgia; it includes 22 mammals, 28 birds, and 18 reptiles and amphibians. It includes some animals you probably already know, such as deer and bald eagles, but others you may not know about, such as eastern indigo snakes or aningas. I've selected the species in this book because they are widespread (northern cardinal, page 82), abundant (white-tailed deer, page 54), or well-known but hard to spot (coyote, page 20).

The book is organized by types 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 when 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.

## Notes About Icons

Each species page includes basic information about an animal, from what it eats to how it survives the winter. The book also includes information that's neat to know; in the mammals section, each page includes a simple track illustration of the animal, with approximate track size included. And along the bottom, there is an example track pattern for the mammal, with the exception for those that primarily glide or fly (flying squirrels and bats).

On the left-hand page for each mammal, a rough-size illustration is included that shows how big the animal is when compared to a basketball.



Also on the left-hand page, there are icons that tell you when each animal is most active: nocturnal (at night), diurnal (during the day), or crepuscular (at dawn/dusk), so you know when to look. If an animal has a "zzz" icon, it hibernates during the winter. Some animals hibernate every winter, and their internal processes (breathing and heartbeat) slow down almost entirely. Other animals only partially hibernate, but this still helps them save energy and survive through the coldest part of the year.



nocturnal  
(active at night)



diurnal  
(active during day)



crepuscular  
(most active at  
dawn and dusk)



hibernates/deep sleeper  
(dormant during winter)



### Did you know?

Beavers are rodents! Yes, these flat-tailed mammals are rodents, like rats and squirrels. In fact, they are the largest native rodents in North America. Just like other rodents, beavers have large incisors, which they use to chew through trees to build dams and dens. Beavers are the original wetland engineers. By damming rivers and streams, beavers create ponds and wetlands.

Size Comparison

Most Active

Track Size





# American Beaver

*Castor canadensis*

**Size:** Body is 25–30 inches long; tail is 9–13 inches long; weighs 30–70 pounds

**Habitat:** Wooded wetland areas near ponds, streams, and lakes

**Range:** Beavers can be found throughout Georgia and in much of the rest of the United States.

**Food:** Leaves, twigs, and stems; they also feed on fruits and aquatic plant roots. Throughout the year they gather and store tree cuttings, which they eat in winter.

**Den:** A beaver's home is called a lodge. It consists of a pile of branches that is splattered with mud and vegetation. Lodges are constructed on the banks of lakes and streams and have exits and entrances that are underwater.

**Young:** Young beavers (kits) are born in late April through May and June in litters of 3–4. After two years they are considered mature and will be forced out of the den.

**Predators:** Bobcats, cougars, bears, wolves, and coyotes. Human trappers are major predators too.

**Tracks:** A beaver's front foot looks a lot like your hand; it has five fingers. The hind (back) foot is long, with five separate toes that have webbing or extra skin between them.

Beavers range from dark brown to reddish brown. They have a stocky body with hind legs that are longer than the front legs. The beaver's body is covered in dense fur, but its tail is naked and has special blood vessels that help it cool or warm its body.





### Did you know?

The raccoon is great at catching fish and other aquatic animals, such as mussels and crawfish. They are also excellent swimmers but they apparently avoid swimming because the water makes their fur heavy. Raccoons can turn their feet 180 degrees; this helps them when climbing, especially when going head-first down trees.

Size Comparison



Most Active



Track Size



Hibernates







# Northern Raccoon

*Procyon lotor*

**Size:** 24–40 inches long; weighs 15–28 pounds

**Habitat:** Woody areas, grasslands, suburban and urban areas, wetlands, and marshes

**Range:** They are found throughout Georgia and the US; they are also found in Mexico and southern Canada.

**Food:** Eggs, insects, garbage, garden plants, berries, nuts, fish, carrion, small mammals, and aquatic invertebrates like crawfish and mussels

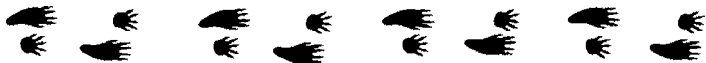
**Den:** Raccoon dens are built in hollow trees, abandoned burrows, caves, and human-made structures.

**Young:** 2–6 young (kits) are born around March through July. They are born weighing 2 ounces, are around 4 inches long, and are blind with lightly colored fur.

**Predators:** Coyotes, foxes, bobcats, humans, and even large birds of prey

**Tracks:** Their front tracks resemble human handprints. The back tracks sort of look like human footprints.

The northern raccoon has dense fur with variations of brown, black, and white streaks. It has black, mask-like markings on its face and a black-and-gray/brownish ringed tail. During the fall, it will grow a thick layer of fat to aid in staying warm through the winter.





### 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



Migrates





# 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 Georgia; 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 fall, laying eggs between November–February.

**Nest:** They build a large nest out of sticks, high up in trees; 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 Georgia, many eagles do not migrate at all.

Adult bald eagles have a dark-brown body, a white head and tail, and a golden-yellow beak. Juvenile eagles are mostly brown at first, but their color pattern changes over their first few years. A bald eagle can use its wings as oars to propel itself across bodies of water.



### Did you know?

The male alligator does not have vocal cords. The growling or roaring sound that males make in order to attract females comes from the alligator filling its lungs with air and exhaling. Alligators sometimes trick birds into landing or flying close to them by placing sticks and vegetation on their head; birds looking for nesting material will fly and try to retrieve the sticks and be met by the gator's mouth.

Most Active





# American Alligator

*Alligator mississippiensis*

**Size:** 8–16 feet long; weighs up to 1,000 pounds

**Habitat:** Freshwater ponds, coastal areas, rivers, swamps, and brackish water (mix of fresh and saltwater)

**Range:** They are found throughout central and southern Georgia, as they are native to the southeastern US. Sometimes found in the Atlanta area

**Food:** Opportunistic carnivores that feed on snakes, fish, birds, mammals, insects, and sometimes even fruit

**Mating:** Starts in spring and goes until May or early June. Mating takes place at night. Males have multiple mates.

**Nest:** Nests are made of plant material and can be 3 feet tall by 7 feet wide. Eggs are covered with vegetation.

**Eggs:** 35–50 white eggs

**Young:** Eggs hatch about 2 months after laying. Hatchling sex is temperature dependent; nest temperatures below 88 degrees or above 90½ degrees are usually female, and temperatures of 89½ to around 90½ degrees are usually male. They reach independence at 1 year and reproductive age at around 10 years. Hatchlings form pods or groups and alert others to nearby danger by making clicking noises.

**Predators:** Humans; as juveniles: birds, snakes, bobcats, raccoons, otters, large fish, and older alligators

The American alligator is a thick-bodied reptile with short legs. It has a wide U-shaped snout. The body has thick skin that comes in colors of black to brownish gray; the tail is thick and muscular; the underside is white. Hatchlings are striped for the first several months. If the water freezes, alligators will bury themselves in mud and stick their snouts out for several days.

# Get to Know the Wild Side of Georgia!



Learn about 68 of Georgia's most important birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The *Critters of Georgia* 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

- 68 critters—only Georgia 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, the celebration of Black individual scientists, and 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 / GEORGIA

ISBN 978-1-64755-411-8



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