

Critters of Colorado



Pocket Guide to Animals in Your State

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produced in cooperation with Wildlife Forever

Contents

About Wildlife Forever	2	Pronghorn.....	40
Acknowledgments	3	Ringtail	42
Dedication	3	Rocky Mountain	
Introduction.....	6	Bighorn Sheep	44
Colorado:		Swift Fox	46
The Centennial State.....	7	Virginia Opossum	48
How to Use This Guide	9	White-tailed Deer	50
Safety Note	9	Yellow-bellied Marmot	52
Notes About Icons.....	10		

Mammals

American Badger	12
American Beaver	14
Bison	16
Black Bear	18
Black-footed Ferret	20
Black-tailed Prairie Dog.....	22
Coyote	24
Elk.....	26
Moose	28
Mountain Lion	30
North American Porcupine ..	32
Northern Raccoon	34
Northern River Otter.....	36
Pika	38

Birds

American Goldfinch.....	54
Bald Eagle	56
Belted Kingfisher	58
Black-capped Chickadee.....	60
Brown-capped Rosy-finch....	62
Burrowing Owl	64
Canvasback Duck.....	66
Cinnamon Teal	68
Double-crested Cormorant ..	70
Dusky Grouse	72
Ferruginous Hawk	74
Golden Eagle	76
Gray Catbird.....	78
Great Blue Heron	80
Great Horned Owl.....	82

Hairy/Downy Woodpecker ...	84	Texas Horned Lizard	132
Lark Bunting	86	Western Tiger Salamander ..	134
Lewis's Woodpecker	88	Wood Frog.....	136
Mallard	90		
Mountain Bluebird.....	92	Glossary.....	138
Mourning Dove	94	Checklist.....	140
Osprey	96	The Art	
Peregrine Falcon.....	98	of Conservation®	142
Sandhill Crane.....	100	Photo Credits.....	143
Short-eared Owl.....	102	About the Author	144
Western Tanager.....	104		
White-tailed Ptarmigan.....	106		
Wild Turkey	108		
Wood Duck.....	110		

Reptiles and Amphibians

Eastern Collared Lizard.....	112
Eastern Painted Turtle	114
Great Plains Toad.....	116
Ornate Box Turtle	118
Plains Hognose Snake	120
Prairie Rattlesnake	122
Smooth Green Snake.....	124
Snapping Turtle, Common ..	126
Speckled Kingsnake	128
Spiny Softshell Turtle	130

How to Use This Guide

This book is your introduction to some of the wonderful critters found in Colorado; it includes 21 mammals, 30 birds, and 13 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 horned lizards or ptarmigans. I've selected the species in this book because they are widespread (northern raccoon, page 34), abundant (black-capped chickadee, page 60), or well-known, but best observed from a safe distance (common snapping turtle, page 126).

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.



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 Colorado, as well as much of the rest of the US.

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 crayfish. 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 headfirst 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 Colorado 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 crayfish and mussels

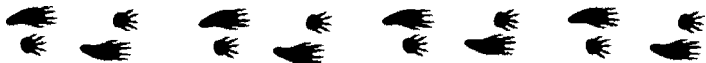
Den: Raccoon dens are built in hollow trees, abandoned burrows, caves, and human-made structures.

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 stay warm in the winter.





Did you know?

The American goldfinch helps restore habitats by spreading seeds. The goldfinch gets its color from a pigment called a carotenoid (say it, kuh-rot-en-oid) in the seeds it eats. It can even feed upside down by using its feet to bring seeds to its mouth.

Nest Type



Most Active



Migrates





American Goldfinch

Spinus tristis

Size: 4½–5 inches long; wingspan of 9 inches; weighs about half an ounce

Habitat: Grasslands, meadows, suburban areas, and wetlands

Range: Found throughout most of Colorado during the non-breeding season; they can be found in far northern parts of the state as year-round residents. They are found all over the US.

Food: Seeds of plants and trees; sometimes feeds on insects; loves thistle seeds at birdfeeders

Nesting: Goldfinches build nests in late June.

Nest: Cup-shaped nests are built a couple of feet above-ground out of roots and plant fibers.

Eggs: 2–7 eggs with a bluish-white tint

Young: Young (chicks) hatch around 15 days after being laid; they hatch without feathers and weigh only a gram. Chicks learn to fly after around 11–15 days. Young become mature at around 11 months old.

Predators: Garter snakes, blue jays, American kestrels, and cats

Migration: Populations in the northern portion of the state are year-round residents, while the southern populations migrate north to breed and return to overwinter in Colorado.

During the summer, American goldfinch males are brightly colored with golden-yellow feathers and an orange beak. They have black wings with white wing bars. The crown (top) of the head is black. In winter, they molt, and the males look more like the females. Females are always greenish yellow with hints of yellow around the head.



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



Most Active



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 Colorado; 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 at 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: Many migrate to Colorado during winter, with over 200 breeding pairs being year-round residents.

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?

When they are in danger or threatened, eastern collared lizards will stand up and run on their hind legs. They can reach speeds over 15 miles per hour to escape predators.

Most Active





Eastern Collared Lizard

Crotaphytus collaris

Size: 8–14 inches long; weighs 2 to 4½ ounces

Habitat: Rocky canyons, cliffs, shrublands, flat canyon bottoms, woodlands, areas with exposed bedrock, and gullies

Range: They can be found in northern Mexico and several western states. In Colorado, they can be found in the southern portion of the state.

Food: Small snakes, grasshoppers, moths, spiders, beetles, and other lizards

Mating: Mid-May–early June

Nest: Burrow dug beneath a large rock

Eggs: 4–10 eggs per clutch are laid within 20 days after breeding; may lay a second clutch.

Young: Hatchlings hatch 2–2½ months after being laid. They experience a rapid growth and are large enough to mate at around 1 or 2 years. Hatchlings' sex is dependent on egg temperature during incubation.

Predators: Coyotes, bobcats, lizards, birds, pet cats, snakes, foxes, and hawks

The eastern collared lizard sports a large head and long tail. Breeding males are various shades of tans with bright blues and greens and a bright-yellow head. They have irregular spots or blotches across their body. Females are brownish to green in color. Females that are carrying eggs have spots on their bodies that fade after they have laid their eggs. Both males and females have one irregular black line that sits just behind the head, with a second broader and wider line that extends across the neck and stops at the top of the front limbs. Juveniles are yellow with a collar that resembles the adults. They have a series of orange-to-yellowish blotches down their body.

Get to Know the Wild Side of Colorado!



Learn about 64 of Colorado's most important birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The *Critters of Colorado* 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

- 64 critters—only Colorado 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.

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