

Critters ^{of} Massachusetts



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 Massachusetts; it includes 22 mammals, 32 birds, and 12 reptiles and amphibians. It includes some animals you probably already know, such as porcupines and bald eagles, but others you may not know about, such as smooth green snakes or double-crested cormorants. I've selected the species in this book because they are widespread (American robin, page 56), abundant (white-tailed deer, page 52), or well-known but best observed from a safe distance (common snapping turtle, page 132).

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 most of Massachusetts, except the areas around Cape Cod; found 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?

Female bears weigh between 90 and 300 pounds and are smaller than the average adult human male in the US. But don't let their small size fool you; with a bite force around 800 pounds per square inch (PSI) and a swiping force of over 400 pounds, these bears are not to be taken lightly.

Size Comparison



Most Active



Track Size



Hibernates





Black Bear

Ursus americanus

Size: 5–6 feet long (nose to tail); weighs 90–600 pounds

Habitat: Forests, mountains, lowland areas, and swamps

Range: In Massachusetts, black bears can be found in central and western parts of the state. They are found in much of North America, from northern Canada down into Mexico.

Food: Berries, fish, crops, small mammals, wild grapes, tree shoots, ants, bees, and even deer fawns

Den: Denning usually starts in December, with bears emerging in late March or April. Dens can be either dug (out of a hillside, for example) or constructed with materials such as leaves, grass, and moss.

Young: Two cubs are usually born at one time (a litter), often in January. Cubs are born blind and without fur, with pink skin. They weigh 8–16 ounces.

Predators: Humans and other bears. Sometimes, other carnivores, such as mountain lions, wolves, coyotes, or even bobcats, will prey on black bears. Cubs are especially vulnerable.

Tracks: Front print is usually 4–6 inches long and 3½–5 inches wide, with the hind foot being 6–7 inches long and 3½–5 inches wide. The feet have five toes.

Black bears are usually black in color, but they can be many different variations of black and brown. Some even have grayish, reddish, or blond fur.





Did you know?

The American kestrel is the smallest species of falcon not only in the US but in all of North America! It's also the most common falcon of North America.

Nest Type



Most Active





American Kestrel

Falco sparverius

Size: 8½–12¼ inches long; wingspan of 20 inches; weight: 2¾–6 ounces

Habitat: Cities, suburbs, forests, and open areas such as meadows, grasslands, deserts, parks, and farm fields

Range: They can be found throughout Massachusetts year-round; throughout most of North America except the extreme north of Canada and Alaska.

Food: Grasshoppers, dragonflies, small birds, lizards, and mice; sometimes snakes, bats, and squirrels

Nesting: Nest in cavities that are made by other birds like woodpeckers, in human-made and natural crevices like tree hollows, and in crevices of rock formations.

Nest: They do not use nesting materials but will make a small depression if material is already present.

Eggs: 4–5 yellowish to white or burnt red-brown eggs, 1–1½ inches long and 1 inch wide

Young: Chicks hatch 25–33 days after laying and will leave the nest around 30 days later. Chicks hatch with pink skin and little down feathers.

Predators: Snakes; large birds of prey, like hawks, owls, and crows; bobcats, skunks, and other mammals

Migration: Not a migrant in Massachusetts

Kestrels sport a rusty-brown, spotted back. Their tail has a black band that stretches across it. Females have brown-to-reddish wings, and the males have grayish-blue wings. Both males and females have black lines under their eyes that resemble mascara or makeup running down their face.



Did you know?

American robins have a great sense of hearing. They hunt for earthworms underground using only their hearing. Robins are opportunistic feeders in urban (city) areas; they will wait for lawns to be disturbed by mowers, sprinklers, or rain, and then feed on the worms that have emerged.

Nest Type



Most Active





American Robin

Turdus migratorius

Size: 9–11 inches long; wingspan of 17 inches; weighs 2½–3 ounces

Habitat: Cities, forests, and lawns

Range: They can be found throughout Massachusetts year-round and throughout North America except the extreme north of Canada.

Food: Fruits, earthworms, beetle grubs, caterpillars, insects, and grasshoppers

Nesting: April to July

Nest: Cup-shaped nests are exclusively built by the female 5–14 feet off the ground in bushes or trees. Nests are constructed of grass, paper, twigs, and feathers. A new nest is built for each set of eggs.

Eggs: 3–5 sky-blue eggs

Young: Eggs hatch after 14 days of incubation; chicks hatch blind and mostly without feathers. Hatchlings (chicks) leave the nest after 2 weeks but will continue to beg for food from parents.

Predators: Snakes, crows, cats, foxes, raccoons, squirrels, raptors, and weasels

Migration: Year-round resident

American robin males have a dark black-to-gray head with a yellow bill, a brown back, a rusty-orange chest, and a whitish ring around the eyes. Females are similar in color but are not as bright as males, and they usually have a brownish head.



Did you know?

Bog turtles are the smallest species of turtle in North America. Bog turtles' shells are not strong enough to protect them from predators, so they will bury themselves into mud when threatened.

Most Active



Hibernates





Bog Turtle

Glyptemys muhlenbergii

Size: 3–4½ inches long; weighs 4 ounces

Habitat: Meadows, prairies, forests, suburban areas, bogs, marshes, swamps, and other wetlands

Range: Found as far north as New York and as far south as northeast Georgia and westward to Ohio. In Massachusetts, they can only be found in Berkshire County.

Food: Omnivore that eats aquatic plants, algae, insects, snails, earthworms, seeds, berries, snakes, and carrion or dead animals

Mating: April to June

Nest: Nests are built in elevated portions of grasses or moss in wetlands; females dig a cavity.

Eggs: 2–5, white, elongated eggs, about 1¼ inches long

Young: Young hatch 42–70 days after laying; temperature determines the sex of hatchlings. Hatchlings are just under an inch. Males are larger than females at hatching and grow faster; both sexes are fully grown around 5–6 years but are not reproductively mature until 8–11 years.

Predators: Raccoons, skunks, foxes, dogs, and birds

Bog turtles have a dome-shaped carapace (top shell) that comes in variations of light–dark brown. The carapace has rings on its scutes that usually have orange-yellow centers. The plastron is also varying shades of brown. They have dark-brown-to-black skin with a large yellow-to-orange or reddish spot on the side of their neck. Males have a shell that caves inward, while females have a relatively flat shell.

Get to Know the Wild Side of Massachusetts!



Learn about 66 of Massachusetts's most important birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The *Critters of Massachusetts* 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

- 66 critters—only Massachusetts 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.

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