

Critters of Wisconsin



Pocket Guide to Animals in Your State

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produced in cooperation with Wildlife Forever

Contents

About Wildlife Forever	2
Acknowledgments	3
Dedication	3
Introduction.....	6
Wisconsin: The Badger State..	7
How to Use This Guide	9
Safety Note	9
Notes About Icons.....	10

Mammals

American Badger	12
American Beaver	14
Black Bear	16
Bobcat	18
Coyote	20
Eastern Cottontail.....	22
Eastern Fox Squirrel.....	24
Elk.....	26
Fisher	28
Gray Wolf	30
Little Brown Bat.....	32
Meadow Vole	34
Mink.....	36
Moose	38

North American Porcupine	40
Northern Raccoon	42
Northern River Otter	44
Red Fox.....	46
Snowshoe Hare.....	48
Southern Flying Squirrel	50
Striped Skunk.....	52
Virginia Opossum	54
White-tailed Deer	56

Birds

American Goldfinch.....	58
American Robin	60
Bald Eagle	62
Barred Owl	64
Belted Kingfisher	66
Black-capped Chickadee.....	68
Blue Jay.....	70
Canada Goose.....	72
Common Loon	74
Eastern Bluebird.....	76
Great Blue Heron	78
Great Horned Owl.....	80

Hairy/Downy	Eastern Newt.....124
Woodpecker 82	Eastern Tiger
Hooded Merganser 84	Salamander.....126
Mallard 86	Gray Tree Frog.....128
Mourning Dove 88	Northern Leopard Frog130
Northern Cardinal 90	Ornate Box Turtle132
Northern Shoveler 92	Snapping Turtle, Common ..134
Osprey 94	Wood Frog.....136
Red-tailed Hawk/	Glossary.....138
Red-shouldered Hawk..... 96	Checklist.....140
Red-winged Blackbird 98	The Art
Ring-billed Gull100	of Conservation®142
Rose-breasted Grosbeak102	Photo Credits.....143
Snow Goose.....104	About the Author144
Snowy Owl106	
Trumpeter Swan108	
Whooping Crane110	
Wild Turkey112	
Wood Duck.....114	

Reptiles and Amphibians

American Toad116
Eastern Garter Snake118
Eastern Hognose Snake.....120
Eastern Massasauga
Rattlesnake122

How to Use This Guide

This book is your introduction to some of the wonderful critters found in Wisconsin; it includes 23 mammals, 31 birds, and 11 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 massasauga rattlesnakes or rose-breasted grosbeaks. I've selected the species in this book because they are widespread (American badger, page 12), abundant (black-capped chickadee, page 68), or well-known but best observed from a safe distance (black bear, page 16).

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 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 Wisconsin 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.

Ranges from dark brown to reddish brown. They have a stocky body with hind legs that are longer than the front legs. Their body is covered in dense fur, but the tail is naked. A beaver's tail 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 Wisconsin 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





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 Wisconsin year-round; they can be found throughout much of the United States and southern Canada during various times of the year.

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

Nesting: Goldfinches build a nest 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: Nonmigratory in Wisconsin; in some states, it will migrate north for breeding territories and south for wintering areas.

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?

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. The American robin is the state bird of Wisconsin!

Nest Type



Most Active



Migrates





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 most of Wisconsin year-round, and during the breeding season they can be found in the far northern parts of the state and throughout North America except the extreme north of Canada.

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

Nesting: April to August

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: Some birds stay throughout the winter, but the majority (especially in northern Wisconsin) migrate south to warmer areas.

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?

Leopard frogs are used by humans in many ways, including in 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

Hibernates





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 Wisconsin; there are strong populations into Canada and throughout the northeastern 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 5,000 or more eggs are laid in one egg mass that is 2–5 inches wide.

Young: Tadpoles hatch about 2–3 weeks after eggs are 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. 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 Wisconsin!



Learn about 65 of Wisconsin's most important birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. The *Critters of Wisconsin* 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

- 65 critters—only Wisconsin 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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