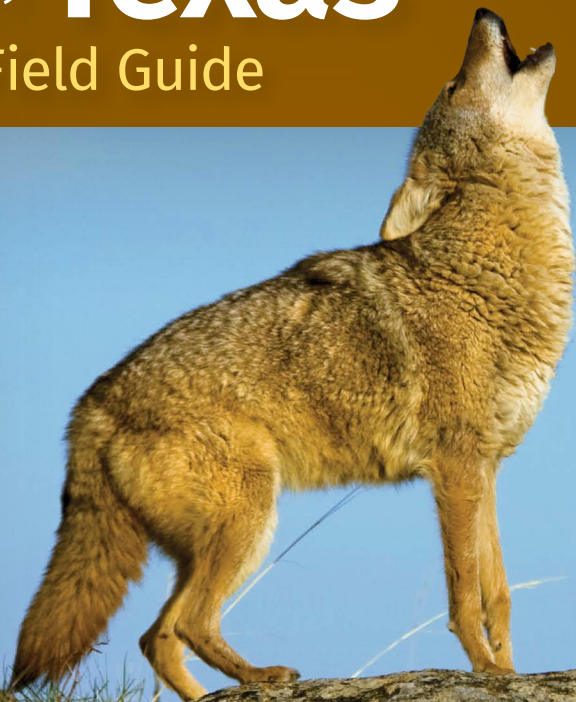


2ND EDITION

Mammals *of* Texas

Field Guide



Stan Tekiela

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American Beaver

Castor canadensis



Family: Beavers (Castoridae)

Size: L 3–4' (0.9–1.2 m); T 7–14" (18–36 cm)

Weight: 20–60 lb. (9–27 kg)

Description: Reddish brown fur. Body often darker than head. Large, flat, naked black tail, covered with scales. Small round ears. Large, exposed orange incisors. Tiny eyes.

Origin/Age: native; 10–15 years

Compare: Much larger than Muskrat (pg. 109), which has a long narrow tail. Look for a large flat tail to help identify the American Beaver.

Habitat: rivers, streams, ponds, lakes, ditches, wherever trees and water are present

Home: den, called a lodge, hollow inside with holes on top for ventilation, 1–2 underwater entrances; beavers that live on rivers often dig burrows in riverbanks rather than constructing dens

Food: herbivore; soft bark, inner bark, aquatic plants, green leaves

Sounds: loud slap created by hitting the surface of water with the tail before diving when alarmed, chewing or gnawing sounds when feeding or felling trees

Breeding: Jan–Mar mating; 120 days gestation

Young: 1–8 kits once per year; about 1 lb. (0.5 kg); born well furred with eyes open, able to swim within 1 week



Signs: dam and lodge made from large woody branches can indicate current or former activity since structures remain well after the beaver has moved on or been killed, chewed tree trunks with large amounts of wood chips at the base of trees, flattened paths through vegetation leading to and from a lake; oval pellets, 1" (2.5 cm) long, containing sawdust-like material and bark, scat seldom on land

Activity: nocturnal, crepuscular; active year-round

Tracks: hind paw 5" (13 cm) long with 5 toes pointing forward and a long narrow heel, forepaw 3" (7.5 cm) with 5 splayed toes; wide tail drag mark often wipes out paw prints



Stan's Notes: Largest member of the Rodentia order in Texas. Body is well suited for swimming. Valves close off the ears and nostrils when underwater, and a clear membrane covers the eyes. Can remain submerged up to 15 minutes. Webbed toes on hind feet help it swim as fast as 6 mph (10 km/h). Special lips seal the mouth yet leave the front incisors exposed, allowing it to carry branches in its mouth without water getting inside. At the lodge, it eats the soft bark of smaller branches the same way we eat corn on the cob. Doesn't eat the interior wood. Stores branches for later use by sticking them in mud on a lake or river bottom.

Has a specialized claw on each hind foot that is split like a comb and is used for grooming. Secretes a pungent oily substance (castor) from glands near the base of its tail. Castor is used to mark territories or boundaries called castor mounds.

Monogamous and mates for life. However, will take a new mate if partner is lost. Can live up to 20 years in captivity.

Young remain with parents through their first winter. They help cut and store a winter food source and maintain the dam while parents raise another set of young. Young disperse at 2 years.

Builds a dam to back up a large volume of water, creating a pond. Cuts trees at night by gnawing trunks. Uses larger branches to construct the dam and lodge. Cuts smaller branches and twigs of felled trees into 6-foot (1.8 m) sections. Dam repair is triggered by the sound of moving water, not by sight. Most repair activity takes place at night.

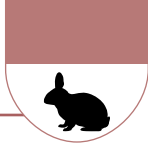
No other mammal except people changes its environment as much as beavers. Frogs, turtles, and many bird species, including ducks, herons, and egrets, benefit from the newly created habitat. Beaver ponds play an important role in moose populations in other areas where moose live. Moose feed on aquatic plants, cool themselves, and escape biting insects in summer in beaver ponds.





Eastern Cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus



Family: Rabbits and Hares (Leporidae)

Size: L 14–18" (36–45 cm); T 1–2" (2.5–5 cm)

Weight: 2–4 lb. (0.9–1.8 kg)

Description: Overall gray to light brown. Black-tipped hairs give it a grizzled appearance. Usually has a small white (rarely black) spot on forehead between the ears. Large pointed ears, rarely with a black outside edge. Distinctive rusty red nape. Brown tail with a white cotton-like underside.

Origin/Age: native; 1–3 years

Compare: Since cottontails are so similar, use range to help identify. Desert Cottontail (pg. 175) is smaller and is found mainly in the western half of Texas. Swamp Rabbit (pg. 183), the largest cottontail, is not seen in the western half of Texas.

Habitat: wide variety such as open fields, brush piles, rock piles, along rivers and streams, woodlands

Home: shallow nest, lined with soft plant material and fur, covered with dry grasses and leaves

Food: herbivore; grass, dandelions, other green plants in spring and summer; saplings, twigs, bark, and other woody plants in winter

Sounds: loud high-pitched scream or squeal when caught by a predator such as a fox or coyote

Breeding: late Feb–Mar mating; 30 days gestation; starts to breed at 3 months

Young: 3–6 offspring up to 5 times per year; born naked and helpless with eyes closed



camouflaged



Signs: small woody twigs and branches near the ground are cleanly cut off and at an angle, while browse from deer is higher up and has a ragged edge (due to the lack of upper incisors in deer), bark is stripped off of saplings and shrubs; dry, pea-sized light brown pellets, round and woody; soft green pellets are ingested and rarely seen

Activity: nocturnal, crepuscular; often very active during late winter and early spring when males fight to breed with females

Tracks: hind paw 3–4" (7.5–10 cm) long, forepaw 1" (2.5 cm) long, small and round; 1 set of 4 tracks; forepaws fall one in front of the other behind hind prints



scat



Stan's Notes: The most widespread of the eight cottontail species in North America, seen in the eastern United States, all of Texas, and most of Mexico. Transplanted to many areas that historically did not have cottontails. Common name was given for its cotton ball-like tail.

Usually stays in a small area of only a couple acres. Often freezes, hunkers down and flattens ears if danger is near. Quickly runs in a zigzag pattern, circling back to its starting spot when flushed. Able to leap up to 12–15 feet (3.7–4.5 m) in a single bound while running. Also jumps sideways while running to break its scent trail. Uses a set of well-worn trails in winter, usually in thick cover of bushes. Cools itself on hot summer days by stretching out in shaded grassy areas.

Usually not a territorial animal, with fights among males breaking out only during mating season. Interspersed with chasing, males face each other, kick with front feet, and jump high into the air.

After mating, the female excavates a small area for a nest, lines it with soft plants and fur from her chest for comfort, and camouflages the entrance.

Mothers nurse their helpless babies at dawn, as well as at dusk. Once the young can open their eyes and are moving outside the nest,



they are on their own and get no further help from their mother. One of the most reproductively successful rabbit species in North America, with some females producing as many as 35 offspring annually; however, most young do not live longer than 1 year.

Like other rabbits and hares, this species produces fecal pellets that are dry and brown or soft and green. Eats the green pellets to regain the nutrition that wasn't digested initially.





Northern Raccoon

Procyon lotor



Family: Raccoons (Procyonidae)

Size: L 24–25" (61–64 cm); T 7–16" (18–40 cm)

Weight: 12–35 lb. (5.4–15.8 kg)

Description: Overall gray to brown, sometimes nearly black to silver. Distinctive black band across face (mask), eyes and down to the chin. White snout. Bushy, black-tipped brown tail with 4–6 evenly spaced dark bands or rings.

Origin/Age: native; 6–10 years

Compare: Very distinctive animal. The black mask and dark rings on the tail make it hard to confuse with any other species.

Habitat: almost all habitats, rural and urban, always near water

Home: hollow tree, or underground den where trees are absent

Food: omnivore; crayfish, fish, reptiles, amphibians, nuts, fruit, green leaves, suet, birdseed (especially black-oil sunflower seeds and thistle), small mammals, baby birds, bird eggs, insects

Sounds: very loud snarls, growls, hisses, and screams are common (and may be frightening) during the mating season, soft purring sounds and quiet chuckles between mothers and babies

Breeding: Feb–Jun mating; 54–65 days gestation; female in heat (estrus) for only 3–6 days

Young: 3–6 offspring per year, usually in May; born with eyes closed, leaves den at 7–8 weeks



Signs: pile of half-digested berries deposited on a log, rock, under a bird feeder, or on top of a garbage can; scat is usually cylindrical, 2" (5 cm) long and $\frac{3}{4}$ " (2 cm) wide, but can be highly variable due to diet



Activity: nocturnal; active year-round except during cold snaps in winter

Tracks: hind paw $3\frac{1}{2}$ – $4\frac{1}{2}$ " (9–11 cm) long with 5 long toes and claw marks, forepaw $2\frac{1}{2}$ –3" (6–7.5 cm) long, slightly longer than wide with 5 distinct toes and claw marks; forepaws land (register) next to hind prints, 8–20" (20–50 cm) stride



Stan's Notes: Raccoons are native only to the Americas from Central America to the United States and lower Canada. Northern Raccoon is found throughout Texas in nearly all habitats. Common name is from the Algonquian word *aroubcoune*, meaning “he scratches with his hands.” Known for the ability to open such objects as doors, coolers, and latches. Uses its nimble fingers to feel around the edges of ponds, rivers, and lakes for crayfish and frogs. Known to occasionally wash its food before eating, hence the species name *lotor*, meaning “washer.” However, it is not washing its food, but kneading and tearing it apart. The water helps it feel the parts that are edible and those that are not. A strong swimmer.

Able to climb any tree very quickly and can come down headfirst or tail end first. Its nails can grip bark no matter which way it climbs because it can rotate its hind feet nearly 180 degrees so that the hind toes always point up the tree.

Active at night, sleeping in hollow trees or other dens during the day. Often mistakenly associated with forests. Also lives in grasslands, using underground dens, but never is far from water.

Usually solitary as an adult. Does not hibernate but may sleep or simply hole up in a comfortable den in January and February, depending on the weather. Will occasionally den in small groups of the same sex, usually males, or females without young.

Males wander many miles in search of a mate. Females use the same den for several months while raising their young, but move out afterward and find a new place to sleep each night. Males are not involved in raising young. Young remain with the adult female for nearly a year.





gray morph



Virginia Opossum

Didelphis virginiana



Family: Opossums (Didelphidae)

Size: L 25–30" (64–76 cm); T 10–20" (25–50 cm)

Weight: 4–14 lb. (1.8–6.3 kg)

Description: Two color morphs, gray and dark. Gray-to-brown body, sometimes nearly black. White head, throat, and belly. Long narrow snout with a pink nose. Wide mouth. Oval, naked black ears. Long, scaly, naked, semiprehensile pinkish tail. Short legs and 5 pink toes on the feet. First toe on each hind foot is thumb-like and lacks a nail.

Origin/Age: native; 3–5 years

Compare: Muskrat (pg. 109) is much smaller, all brown and rarely far from water. Norway Rat (pg. 99) also has a long naked tail, but Virginia Opossum is larger with large dark ears and a pink nose. Norway Rat is rarely seen in trees.

Habitat: deciduous forests, farmlands, yards, grasslands, wetlands, along streams and rivers, cities

Home: leaf nest in an underground den or hollow log

Food: omnivore; insects, sunflower and thistle seeds, nuts, berries, fruit, leaves, bird eggs, fish, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, road kill, worms

Sounds: low growls, hisses and shows teeth if threatened, soft clicks between mothers and young

Breeding: Jan–Feb mating; 8–14 days gestation

Young: 2–13 (usually 5–6) offspring once per year; new-borns the size of a navy bean crawl to mother's external fur-lined pouch, where they attach to a nipple for as long as 2 months



in pouch



dark morph



dark morph

Signs: overturned garbage cans; scat on ground under sunflower seed and Nyjer thistle feeders

Activity: nocturnal; can be seen during the day in winter

Tracks: hind paw 2" (5 cm) long with 5 toes, large thumb-like first toe points inward and lacks a nail, forepaw 1½" (4 cm) long with 5 toes spread out; fore and hind prints are parallel, 7" (18 cm) stride, often has a tail drag mark



scat



Stan's Notes: The regular gray morph is found in the northern three-quarters of the state. A dark, nearly black variety that has a black mask and black feet occurs in southern Texas.

The only marsupial found north of Mexico. A unique-looking, interesting animal, the size of a house cat. It has 50 teeth, more than any other mammal in the state. Usually solitary, moving around on the ground from place to place. Also climbs trees well, using its tail to aid in climbing, holding onto branches (semiprehensile). An adult opossum cannot hang by the tail like a monkey, but the young seem able to, perhaps due to their lighter weight.

Frequently feeds on dead animals along roads and is often hit by vehicles. Not a fast mover, it will hiss if threatened and show its short, pointy teeth. When that doesn't work, it often will roll over and feign death with eyes closed, mouth open, and tongue hanging out, "playing 'possum." Does not hibernate, but sleeps in dens for weeks during the coldest part of winter.



Males give loud, aggressive displays during the breeding season and will scent-mark by licking themselves and rubbing their heads against tree trunks or other stationary objects. Young ride on their mother's back after weaning.

Opossums can defend themselves against large predators and survive substantial injuries. One study showed nearly half of all examined dead opossums had healed broken bones, some with multiple fractures. Many opossums are immune to venomous snake bites and have a resistance to rabies and plague.





Red Fox

Vulpes vulpes



Family: Wolves, Foxes, and Coyote (Canidae)

Size: L 22–24" (56–61 cm); T 13–17" (33–43 cm); H 15–16" (38–40 cm)

Weight: 7–15 lb. (3.2–6.8 kg)

Description: Usually rusty red with dark highlights, but can vary from light yellow to black. Large pointed ears trimmed in black with white inside. White jowls, chest, and belly. Legs nearly black. Large bushy tail with a white tip. Fluffy coat in winter and spring. Molts by July, appearing smaller and thinner.

Origin/Age: native; 5–10 years

Compare: Gray Fox (pg. 263) is not as red and has a black-tipped tail. Smaller than the Coyote (pg. 271), usually more red and has a white-tipped tail. All other wild canids lack a tail with a white tip.

Habitat: woodlands, scrublands, rangelands, grasslands, prairies, foothills, mountains, suburbs, cities

Home: den, sometimes a hollow log, may dig a den under a log or a rock in a bank of a stream or in a hillside created when land was cut to build a road, often has a mound of dirt up to 3' (0.9 m) high in front of the main entrance with scat deposits

Food: omnivore; small mammals such as mice, moles, voles, rabbits, and hares; also eats berries, apples, nuts, fish, insects, and carrion

Sounds: hoarse high-pitched barks, yelps to steady high-pitched screams, mournful cries

Breeding: winter (Jan–Mar) mating; 51–53 days gestation

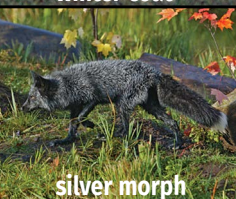
Young: 1–10 kits once per year in April or May



summer coat



winter coat



silver morph



dark morph

Signs: cylindrical scat with a tapered end, can be very dark if berries were eaten, frequently contains hair and bones, often found on a trail, prominent rock or stump or at den entrance

Activity: mainly nocturnal, crepuscular; rests during the middle of the night

Tracks: forepaw 2" (5 cm) long, oval, with hind paw slightly smaller; straight line of single tracks; hind paws fall near or directly onto fore prints (direct register) when walking, often obliterating the forepaw tracks, 10–14" (25–36 cm) stride when walking



scat



Stan's Notes: The most widely distributed wild canid in the world, ranging across North America, Europe, Asia, and northern Africa. Some European Red Foxes were introduced into North America in the 1790s, resulting in confusion regarding the original distribution and lineage. Other individuals are thought to have been introduced into Texas in 1895 for sport hunting and trapping.

Usually alone. Very intelligent and learns from past experiences. Often catlike in behavior, pouncing onto prey. Curls up into a ball and sleeps at the base of a tree or rock, even during winter.



Hunts for mice, moles, and other small prey by stalking, looking, and listening. Hearing differs from the other mammals. Hears low-frequency sounds, enabling it to detect small mammals digging and gnawing underground. Chases larger prey such as rabbits and squirrels. Hunts even if full, caching extra food underground. Finds cached food by memory and using its sense of smell.

While mated pairs actively defend their territory from other foxes, they are often killed by coyotes or wolves. Uses a den only several weeks for birthing and raising young. Parents bring food to kits in the den. At first, parents regurgitate the food. Later they bring fresh meat and live prey to the den, where the kits practice killing. Young are dispersed at the end of their first summer, with the males (dog foxes) traveling 100–150 miles (161–242 km)—much farther than females (vixens)—to establish their own territories.







FORMER
RANGE

Gray Wolf

Canis lupus



Family: Wolves, Foxes, and Coyote (Canidae)

Size: L 4–5' (1.2–1.5 m); T 14–20" (36–50 cm); H 26–38" (66–96 cm)

Weight: 55–130 lb. (25–59 kg)

Description: Usually gray with dark highlights, but can vary from all white to entirely black. A large bushy tail, almost always black-tipped. Short pointed ears with a wide space between. Long legs and huge feet. Male is slightly larger than female.

Origin/Age: native; 5–15 years

Compare: Larger than the Coyote (pg. 271) and has longer legs, larger feet, and shorter ears. Often holds its tail straight out when traveling unlike Coyote, which holds its tail at a downward angle.

Habitat: forests, brushlands, grasslands, open country

Home: shelter or den only for raising young, den can be 5–15' (1.5–4.6 m) deep, frequently more than 1 entrance, fan of dirt at entrance, often scattered bones and fur laying about; used for many years

Food: omnivore; mammals such as mice, rabbits, hares, deer, and bears; also berries, grass, insects, and fish

Sounds: yelps, barks, and howls; howling may rise and fall in pitch or remain the same; rarely has a series of yips or yelps at the end, like the Coyote

Breeding: Jan–Feb mating; 63–65 days gestation

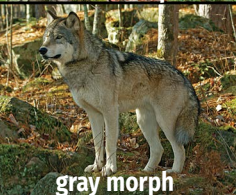
Young: 1–8 pups once per year; born helpless with eyes closed, wide range of color variations, some look like the parents, others are completely different



white morph



black morph



gray morph



pups

Signs: scrapes in the dirt; urine on posts, rocks, and stumps; scat looks like the excrement of a domestic dog, but it is larger and contains hairs and bone fragments

Activity: nocturnal, more diurnal in winter; hunts at night in summer

Tracks: forepaw 5½–6½" (14–16 cm) long, hind paw slightly smaller, both round with clear claw marks; straight line of single tracks; hind paws fall near or directly onto fore prints (direct register) when walking, often obliterating the forepaw tracks, 15–30" (38–76 cm) stride; rarely walks along roads like a domestic dog



scat



Stan's Notes: The largest wild dog species in North America. Once seen across the nation, it was exterminated from Texas and most other places except for states such as Alaska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The last authenticated reports of it in Texas were in December 1970. Reintroduced into New Mexico, Arizona, and elsewhere starting in 1998, with the first litter born in the wild from wild parents occurring in 2002. As of 2007 there were only about 50–60 of these wolves in the wild between Arizona and New Mexico. There has been some discussion of reintroducing the Gray Wolf to Big Bend National Park.

One of the most mobile animals, traveling great distances to find food each day. Eats 3–5 pounds (1.4–2.3 kg) of meat per day, but can go weeks without food. May cache large prey items. Not a good long distance runner, but able to achieve speeds of 30 mph (48 km/h) for short distances. A good swimmer, following prey into the water or swimming to islands in lakes and rivers. Communicates by howling, body posturing, and scent marking.

Shies away from people, but this is a social animal, living in packs of 2–15 individuals that consist primarily of family members. The pack has a well-defined hierarchy with a sole male leader called alpha and his female mate, also alpha.

Territory of a pack covers 100–300 square miles (260–780 sq. km). Often uses the same well-worn trails in some areas. Territories of other packs may overlap. Conflicts rarely occur if food is plentiful.

Packs chase down prey or ambush. Dominant members feed first. Some adults bring food back in their stomachs to pups, since the mothers won't leave them the first month. Pups mob feeder adults and lick their faces, encouraging regurgitation. When the pups are older, some wolves baby-sit while the alpha pair goes hunting with the pack. Young join the pack to hunt in the fall of their first year and leave at 2–3 years to form their own pack or join another. After the pups leave, the pack will rendezvous before and after hunting, usually at a grassy area with a good view of the surroundings.



male



White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus



Family: Deer (Cervidae)

Size: L 4–7' (1.2–2.1 m); T 6–12" (15–30 cm); H 3–4' (0.9–1.2 m)

Weight: M 100–300 lb. (45–135 kg); F 75–200 lb. (34–90 kg)

Description: Reddish brown during summer, grayish brown during winter. Large ears, white inside with black edges. A white eye-ring, nose band, chin, throat, and belly. Brown tail with a black tip and white underside. Male has antlers with many small tines originating from a central beam and an antler spread of 12–36" (30–91 cm). Female is overall smaller, has a thinner neck, and lacks antlers.

Origin/Age: native; 5–10 years

Compare: Mule Deer (pg. 359) has a black-tipped white tail and forked tines from the main beam. Sika Deer (pg. 347) is darker brown, has a small head and short ears and antlers. Fallow Deer (pg. 343) has white spots and distinctive flattened antlers. Axis Deer (pg. 351) has white spots over its body.

Habitat: many habitats, woodlands, scrublands, ranches

Home: no den or nest; sleeps in a different spot every night, beds may be concentrated in one area, does not use a shelter in bad weather

Food: herbivore; grasses and other green plants, acorns, and nuts in summer, twigs and buds in winter

Sounds: loud whistle-like snorts, male grunts, fawn bleats

Breeding: late Oct–Nov mating; 6–7 months gestation

Young: 1–2 fawns once per year in May or June; covered with white spots, walks within hours of birth



young male



tree rub



female



scat

Signs: browsed twigs that are ripped or torn (due to the lack of upper incisor teeth), tree rubs (saplings scraped or stripped of bark) made by male while polishing antlers during the rut, oval depressions in grass or leaves are evidence of beds; round hard brown pellets during winter, segmented cylindrical masses of scat in spring and summer

Activity: nocturnal, crepuscular; moves along same trails to visit feeding areas, most active in early morning and the end of day

Tracks: front hoof 2-3" (5-7.5 cm) long, hind hoof slightly smaller, both with a split heart shape with the point in the front; neat line of single tracks; hind hooves fall near or directly onto fore prints (direct register) when walking



Stan's Notes: Many subspecies of White-tailed Deer in Texas, all appearing similar, all acting the same. More common than Mule Deer (pg. 359), which usually do not occupy the same habitats.



In summer, antlers are covered with a furry skin called velvet. Velvet contains a network of blood vessels that supplies nutrients to growing antlers. New antler growth begins after the male (buck) drops his antlers in January or February. Some females (does) grow antlers. Antler growth is tied to available nutrition. It is impossible to judge the age of a buck by the number of antler tines or antler size due to

the direct correlation between antlers and nutrition. Examining teeth is a better way to estimate age.

Grows much longer guard hairs in winter, giving the animal a larger appearance than in summer. Individual hairs of the winter coat are thick and hollow and provide excellent insulation.

Usually restricts its movement to a relatively small home range and is dependent on the location of the food supply. Eats 5–9 pounds (2.3–4.1 kg) of food per day, preferring acorns in fall and fresh grass in spring. Research shows that Whitetails eat up to 500 different plants. Its four-chambered stomach enables the animal to get nutrients from poor food sources, such as twigs, and eat and drink substances that are unsuitable for people.

Able to run up to 37 mph (60 km/h), jump up to 8½ feet (2.6 m) high and leap 30 feet (9.1 m). Also an excellent swimmer.

The buck is solitary in spring and early summer, but seeks other bucks in late summer and early fall to spar. Bucks are polygamous. The largest, most dominant bucks mate with many does.

For a couple weeks after birth, fawns lay still all day while their mother is away feeding. Mother nurses them evenings and nights.





Black Bear

Ursus americanus



Family: Bears (Ursidae)

Size: L 4½–6' (1.4–1.8 m); T 3–7" (7.5–18 cm); H 3–3½' (0.9–1.1 m)

Weight: M 100–900 lb. (45–405 kg); F 90–525 lb. (41–236 kg)

Description: Nearly all black, sometimes brown, tan, or cinnamon. Short round ears. Light brown snout. May have a small white patch on its chest. Short tail, which often goes unnoticed.

Origin/Age: native; 15–30 years

Compare: The only bear species in Texas.

Habitat: all forest types, grasslands

Home: den, underneath a fallen tree or in a rock crevice or cave, may dig a den 5–6' (1.5–1.8 m) deep with a small cavity at the end; male sometimes hibernates on the ground without shelter

Food: omnivore; leaves, nuts, roots, fruit, berries, grass, insects, fish, small mammals, carrion

Sounds: huffs, puffs, or grunts and groans when walking, loud snorts made by air forced from nostrils, loud roars when fighting and occasionally when mating, motor-like humming when content

Breeding: Jun–Jul mating; 60–90 days gestation; implantation delayed until November after mating

Young: 1–5 (usually 2) cubs every other year in January or February; born covered with fine dark fur, weighing only ½–1 lb. (0.2–0.5 kg)



claw marks

brown morph

Signs: series of long narrow scars on tree trunks, usually as high as the bear can reach, made by scratching and biting, rub marks with snagged hair on the lower part of tree trunks or on large rocks, made by rubbing and scratching when shedding its winter coat; large dark cylindrical scat or piles of loose scat, usually contains berries and nuts, may contain animal hair, undigested plant stems, and roots

Activity: diurnal, nocturnal; often seen feeding during the day

Tracks: hind paw 7–9" (18–23 cm) long, 5" (13 cm) wide with 5 toes, turns inward slightly, looks like a human footprint, forepaw 4" (10 cm) long, 5" (13 cm) wide with 5 toes, claw marks on all feet; fore and hind prints are parallel, hind paws fall several inches in front of fore prints; shuffles feet when walking



scat



Stan's Notes: The Black Bear is unique to North America. Has a shuffling gait and frequently appears clumsy. It is not designed for speed, but can run up to 30 mph (48 km/h) for short distances. A powerful swimmer, however, and good at climbing trees. It has color vision, but poor eyesight and relies on smell to find most of its food. Often alone except for mating in early summer or when bears gather at a large food supply such as a garbage dump. Feeds heavily throughout summer, adding layers of fat for hibernation.

In northern parts of its range it hibernates up to five months per year starting in late fall. In Texas it appears to hibernate for a much shorter time, and occasionally wakes and moves around the den in winter. Heart rate drops from 70 to 10–20 beats per minute. Body temperature drops only 1–12°F (–17°C to –11°C), which is not enough to change mental functions. Doesn't eat, drink, pass feces, or urinate during hibernation despite rousing. A female can lose up to 40 percent of its body weight during hibernation.

A male has a large territory up to 15 square miles (39 sq. km) that often encompasses several female territories. Males fight each other for breeding rights and usually have scars from fights. Male bears mature at 3–4 years, but don't become full size until 10–12 years. They do not help to raise the young.



Females don't breed until 2–3 years of age. A female with more body fat when entering hibernation will have more cubs than others with less fat. If a female lacks enough fat, she won't give birth. Mothers average 177 pounds (80 kg)—about 250 times the size of newborns. A short gestation and tiny cubs are the result of the reproductive process during hibernation.

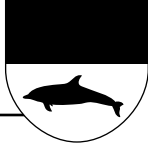
Once considered extinct in Texas. In recent history, bears from Mexico have repopulated the state and are now doing better.





Bottlenose Dolphin

Tursiops truncatus



Family: Marine Dolphins (Delphinidae)

Size: L 8–8½' (2.4–2.6 m)

Weight: 450–550 lb. (203–248 kg)

Description: Smooth and streamlined gray body with a large head, short stocky snout (beak), and lighter belly. Small round eyes on the sides of head. Breathing hole on top of head behind the eyes. Large fin on the back (dorsal) curves back and points toward the tail (falcate). Short, thick powerful tail. Some individuals are darker than others. May have lighter areas of scarring from old injuries. Male is longer and heavier than the female.

Origin/Age: native to Gulf waters off the Texas coast and the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans; 20–25 years

Compare: Larger than Atlantic Spotted Dolphin (pg. 375), which is stockier and has white spotting on its sides. Sperm Whale (pg. 383) is much larger, with a huge body and small dorsal fin and lacks a well-defined beak.

Habitat: open seas, bays, inlets, saltwater lagoons

Home: some stay in 1 bay, others roam open waters with no well-defined territory, often following seasonal patterns; rests in open water near coral reefs

Food: ichthyophagous; fish, squid, invertebrates

Sounds: series of squeaks, pops, and chuckles above and below water

Breeding: Jun–Aug mating; 12 months gestation

Young: 1 calf every 2–3 years; born swimming, nurses for up to 1 year



Signs: shadows of large individuals swimming in groups, riding bow waves of boats, feeding around fishing and shrimp boats, individuals breaking the surface of the water, leaping into the air (breaching) or surfacing for air just offshore

Activity: diurnal, nocturnal; active year-round

Tracks: none

Stan's Notes: A familiar marine mammal, made famous by the television show “Flipper.” Now seen in many marine or aquarium displays and museums. The Bottlenose is the most widespread and common of Gulf coast dolphin and can be seen in relatively shallow water in lagoons, bays, and inlets. The majority, however, are found well out to sea. Found throughout temperate and tropical waters of the world.

Often in groups, called pods or schools, of 2–20 individuals, but can be seen in larger groups of up to 100 dolphins. Some groups are sedentary, remaining in a small territory of one bay; others are migratory. Populations tend to increase off the coast of Texas during fall and winter.

It is thought there are two distinct Bottlenose Dolphin forms in the Gulf of Mexico: inshore dolphins that inhabit shallow water and offshore populations remaining in deeper waters. Differences in body shape and fin size show that the inshore dolphins are adapting to shallower water.

Dolphins eat a wide variety of food depending on the abundance at the time. They eat mainly fish including shark, tarpon, pike, rays, mullet, catfish and anchovies, along with eels. A dolphin can eat 40–50 pounds (18–23 kg) of food daily. Individuals of a group often work together when feeding. Sometimes several dolphins will herd fish into tight schools while others wait at the bottom and swim up to feed. Other times dolphins may simply chase fish into shallow water, where they lunge for their prey.

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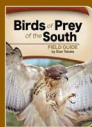
Organized by family and featuring full-color photographs and helpful information, this is your complete guide to mammals in Texas!



About the Author

Naturalist Stan Tekiela is an award-winning wildlife photographer and the author of many popular state-specific field guides. He has written educational books about wildlife, including children's books, quick guides, and more, presenting birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, trees, wildflowers, and cacti.

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