

A POCKET GUIDE TO COMMON *Kansas Mammals*

Second Edition



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American Badger



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—George Potts and Bob Gress



American Beaver

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Mule Deer

Introduction

Mammals are the animals most familiar to people. More than 400 mammal species are native to North America and 88 are found in Kansas. Mammals are the only animals that have hair and feed young with mother's milk. Other characteristics include being warm-blooded, having a backbone, jaws with teeth and a four-chambered heart. Although large mammals may be the most well known, the small and secretive species are the most abundant. This guide highlights 40 of the most visible and common species. The purpose of this booklet is to help you learn about these fascinating Kansas mammals. It's meant for your pocket or glove box. Keep it handy.



Chickadee Checkoff



GREAT PLAINS NATURE CENTER



■ *Virginia Opossum*

Measurements:

Total Length: 26-35 inches

Tail Length: 10-15 inches

Weight: 6-13 pounds

Virginia Opossum

Didelphis virginiana

Comments: Virginia opossums are marsupials. They have a pouch to carry their young. Female marsupials are called jills and their young, joeys. An opossum's head contains a small, primitive brain and a narrow muzzle ending in a pink nose and jaws with 50 teeth (more than any other Kansas mammal). Their front feet have five clawed toes and their hind feet have four clawed toes and an opposable "thumb." The naked, prehensile or grasping tail assists them when climbing. Opossums may give birth in the spring and again later in the summer. Females bear litters of housefly-sized young that crawl to the fur-lined pouch and attach to one of 13 nipples where they feed on milk for about 2 months. The young may then leave the pouch and ride on their mother's back. Opossums lead a solitary, secretive life, wandering from dusk to dawn in search of food, then spending the day sleeping in a brush pile or hollow log. When threatened, opossums may hiss, growl, bite, climb a tree or feign death by "playing possum." Their instinct of "freezing" when alarmed makes them common casualties of vehicles. Their maximum life span in the wild is about 2 years.

Distribution: Virginia opossums range from South America to Canada. They are found throughout Kansas in shrublands, woodlands, croplands and urban backyards.

Food: Virginia opossums are omnivores. Their food includes fruits, seeds, insects, snails, crayfish, frogs, lizards, snakes, mammals and ground nesting birds and their eggs.



■ *Least Shrew*

Measurements:

Total Length: 2.8-3.4 inches

Tail Length: 0.6-0.7 inches

Weight: 0.1-0.2 ounce



■ *Eastern Mole*

Measurements:

Total Length: 5.4-7.5 inches

Tail Length: 0.8-1.5 inches

Weight: 1.9-3.5 ounces

Least Shrew

Cryptotis parva

Comments: Least shrews are the smallest mammals in Kansas and are grayish-brown in color. They have a long, pointed, flexible snout, jaws with 30 teeth, small, beady eyes, small ears and a short tail. Most shrews are solitary but some least shrew nests have been found occupied by several adults of both sexes. Females bear up to three litters with 4-6 young each from March to November. Their maximum lifespan is 18 months.

Distribution: Least shrews range from South America through the eastern half of the United States. In Kansas, they are found in grasslands, shrublands, woodlands and wetlands.

Food: Least shrews feed primarily on insects, snails and earthworms and consume 60 to 100 percent of their body weight each day.

Eastern Mole

Scalopus aquaticus

Comments: Eastern moles spend nearly 100 percent of their time living underground. They are well suited to this lifestyle, having a streamlined body, partially webbed forefeet, a sensitive snout and small ears. Their poorly developed eyes can only distinguish between light and dark. They forage near the top of moist, loamy and sandy soil forming surface ridges. One litter of 3-4 young is born in April or May. Their maximum lifespan is 4 years.

Distribution: Eastern moles range over the eastern half of the United States. They are found throughout Kansas.

Food: They feed mainly on earthworms and insect larvae.



■ *Eastern Red Bat*

Measurements:

Total Length: 4.1-5 inches

Tail Length: 1.7-2.4 inches

Weight: 0.3-0.5 ounces



■ *Big Brown Bat*

Measurements:

Total Length: 4.4-5.2 inches

Tail Length: 1.4-2.2 inches

Weight: 0.5-0.8 ounces

Eastern Red Bat

Lasiurus borealis

Comments: Eastern red bats are solitary, spending the day hanging like leaves from tree limbs. They rarely roost together except for a mother and her young. Males are orange-red and females are chestnut. They forage over fields and water in early evenings and swoop for insects around lights after dark, consuming up to half their weight each night. They migrate in late summer and hibernate in caves, hollow trees and buildings during the winter. Females have one litter of 3-4 pups usually born in June. Their maximum lifespan is 12 years.

Distribution: Eastern red bats range from South America to the southern border of Canada. They are found throughout Kansas.

Food: Eastern red bats feed on flying insects, including small moths, beetles and bugs.

Big Brown Bat

Eptesicus fuscus

Comments: Big brown bats may be the most common bat in Kansas. They have soft, brown fur with a naked face and ears. Females bear 1-2 young in late May or early June. Several hundred may gather in maternity colonies located in barns, bridges and attics, walls and chimneys of old buildings. They hibernate in caves, rock crevices, mines and buildings. Big brown bats forage over water, forest edges and fields from dusk to midnight. They drink by scooping sips of water while flying. They may live up to 19 years in the wild.

Distribution: Big brown bats range from southern Central America into Canada. They are found throughout Kansas in nearly every habitat.

Food: Big brown bats consume approximately a third of their weight each night while feeding on insects, primarily beetles.



■ *Nine-banded Armadillo*

Measurements:

Total Length: 28-31 inches

Tail Length: 10-15 inches

Weight: 7-10 pounds

Nine-banded Armadillo

Dasypus novemcinctus

Comments: Nine-banded armadillos are oval-shaped, night foragers that “wear” protective armor. Their immovable front and rear upper “shields” are connected by nine bands of moveable bony plates. Their head, with the exception of their rabbit-like ears, outer legs and tail are also armored. Yellowish hair grows sparsely on their belly. Strong claws are used for foraging and digging burrows. Their sensitive nose can detect enemies and aid in foraging and burrowing. They have 28-36 undifferentiated peg-like teeth. In March or April, females bear four identical pups of the same sex. Their average lifespan is 4 years. This, however, can be shortened by their instinct to jump straight up when startled, making them a frequent victim of vehicles.

Distribution: Nine-banded armadillos range from South America to south-central and southeastern United States. They are typically found in shrublands and woodlands in the southern half of Kansas.

Food: Nine-banded armadillos feed primarily on earthworms, insect larvae and insects. They also eat small vertebrates, bird eggs, fruits and berries.



■ *Eastern Cottontail*

Measurements:

Total Length: 15-18 inches

Tail Length: 1.4-3 inches

Weight: 2.2-3.3 pounds

Eastern Cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus

Comments: Eastern cottontails have altricial young and shorter ears and legs than hares. During the day they may rest in “forms” or shallow depressions shaded by grasses. Occasionally, they use burrows dug by other mammals to escape severe weather. The underside of their tail and belly fur is white and their upper and side fur is brownish to gray. They forage in the twilight hours and at night. When danger is near they “freeze,” and when threatened, make a zigzag dash to cover. If caught they emit a shrill scream. Breeding from early spring to late fall, females may produce 6-7 litters with 3-6 young per litter. Cottontails are an important food item for many predators. As a result, most rabbits die before they are a year old.

Distribution: The eastern cottontail ranges from Central America through the eastern half of the United States and across the south-central border of Canada. They are found throughout Kansas in shrublands, woodlands, uncultivated croplands and gardens.

Food: Eastern cottontails feed on green vegetation, including grasses, flowers, garden vegetables and the bark of young trees in the winter.



■ *Black-tailed Jackrabbit*

Measurements:

Total Length: 20-24 inches

Tail Length: 2.4-3.7 inches

Weight: 5-9 pounds

Black-tailed Jackrabbit

Lepus californicus

Comments: Black-tailed jackrabbits were named for the black, upper tail fur and long, “jackass-like” ears. They are typical hares, having long ears, long legs and precocial young. They live in open areas with good visibility and scattered shrubs for hiding. They can accelerate rapidly to 40 miles per hour when escaping predators. Black-tailed jackrabbits can leap as high as 6 feet and as far as 20. If caught by a predator, they will shriek, bite and kick. Females can produce 4-7 litters, with 2-4 kits each, from late winter to late summer. In the past, “jackrabbit roundups” were common events where they were herded and clubbed, to both reduce their numbers and to sell as food. In recent years, changes in farming practices have kept their numbers down.

Distribution: Black-tailed jackrabbits range from Baja California and south-central Mexico to west-central and western United States. They prefer arid habitats. They can be found throughout Kansas in prairies, overgrazed rangelands and croplands.

Food: Black-tailed jackrabbits feed on green vegetation, including forbs, grasses, shrubs, cactus, tree bark and agricultural crops.



■ *Eastern Chipmunk*

Measurements:

Total Length: 9.6-12 inches

Tail Length: 3.6-4 inches

Weight: 3-4.3 ounces



■ *Woodchuck*

Measurements:

Total Length: 22-26 inches

Tail Length: 4-8 inches

Weight: 5-12 pounds

Eastern Chipmunk

Tamias striatus

Comments: Eastern chipmunks' presence are usually announced by their chipping vocalizations. They run around nervously gathering and storing food in their underground tunnels. They have bushy tails and reddish-brown fur with dark stripes along their back and face. A litter of 4-5 young are born in April. Longevity is up to 5 years.

Distribution: Eastern chipmunks range throughout the eastern part of the United States and southeast Canada. They are found in oak-hickory woodlands of extreme eastern Kansas.

Food: Eastern chipmunks feed on a variety of nuts, seeds, berries and insects.

Woodchuck

Marmota monax

Comments: Woodchucks, sometimes called "groundhogs," are the largest member of the squirrel family in Kansas. Their gnawing activity wears down their constantly-growing incisor teeth. They live in underground dens, where they hibernate in winter. While hibernating, their heart rate, breathing and body temperatures are greatly reduced for 4-6 months. They may lose up to half their body weight during this period. In spring, females produce 3-4 kits. Longevity is up to 6 years.

Distribution: Woodchucks are found throughout the eastern half of the United States and from southeast Canada into Alaska. In Kansas, they are found in shrublands, woodlands and uncultivated croplands.

Food: Woodchucks feed primarily on wild forbs, but also eat alfalfa, grain crops, bark and buds.



■ *Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel*

Measurements:

Total Length: 9-12 inches

Tail Length: 3-5 inches

Weight: 3-7.5 ounces

Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel

Spermophilus tridecemlineatus

Comments: Thirteen-lined ground squirrels are long, slender burrowing animals with 13 rows of yellowish stripes and spots and internal cheek pouches. They are solitary and forage during the day sitting upright periodically to check for predators. They spend the winter hibernating in their underground dens. Females bear a litter of 8-10 young in May. They can live up to 5 years.

Distribution: Thirteen-lined ground squirrels are native to the prairies of the Great Plains of the United States and Canada. They are found in Kansas in prairies, overgrazed rangelands, parks, cemeteries and golf courses.

Food: Thirteen-lined ground squirrels feed on grasses, seeds, insects and sometimes on small vertebrates such as small birds and reptiles.



■ *Black-tailed Prairie Dog*

Measurements:

Total Length: 14-17 inches

Tail Length: 2-4 inches

Weight: 1-3 pounds

Black-tailed Prairie Dog

Cynomys ludovicianus

Comments: Black-tailed prairie dogs, named for their black-tipped tails and dog-like “bark,” once lived throughout the Great Plains in “towns” that extended for miles and contained hundreds of thousands of individuals. Current dog towns seldom exceed 100 acres due to changes in land use and poisoning. They excavate a complex underground system of tunnels and rooms that may be as deep as 15 feet with horizontal tunnels reaching 10-15 feet long. The soil is pushed to the surface to create numerous mounds. They forage throughout the day with sentinels sitting upright, standing guard as others feed. When a predator is sighted, the sentinel “barks” and the entire colony scampers to their protective burrows. Abandoned burrows provide homes for spiders, salamanders, toads, ornate box turtles, snakes and burrowing owls. In the spring, females produce a single litter of 2-10 pups. They may live up to 8 years.

Distribution: Black-tailed prairie dogs live on the High Plains from northern Mexico to southern Canada. They are found in shortgrass prairies and overgrazed rangelands of the western half of Kansas.

Food: Black-tailed prairie dogs feed primarily on green vegetation, including grasses, forbs, seeds, stems and the occasional insect.



■ *Eastern Gray Squirrel*

Measurements:

Total Length: 15-21 inches

Tail Length: 6-10 inches

Weight: 1-2 pounds



■ *Eastern Fox Squirrel*

Measurements:

Total Length: 18-28 inches

Tail Length: 7-13 inches

Weight: 1-3 pounds

Eastern Gray Squirrel

Sciurus carolinensis

Comments: Eastern gray squirrels have long, bushy tails with whitish fringe and gray fur. They search for food during the day and use their front feet to eat while sitting on their hindquarters. Communications include scolding barks, teeth clicks and tail flicks. Throughout the day they are seen jumping from tree to tree or resting on limbs with their legs dangling down. Females bear litters of 3-6 young in early spring and late summer. They may live as long as 12 years. As woodland cover increases in eastern Kansas, gray squirrels displace fox squirrels.

Distribution: Gray squirrels range throughout the eastern half of the United States and southeast and south-central Canada. They are found in oak-hickory forests in the eastern quarter of Kansas.

Food: Gray squirrels feed on nuts, seeds, berries, buds, insects and occasionally on bird eggs and nestlings.

Eastern Fox Squirrel

Sciurus niger

Comments: Eastern fox squirrels have fox-like, bushy tails with orange fringe and reddish-orange fur. They are larger than eastern gray squirrels and spend more time on the ground. Several nests of leaves may be constructed in forked branches high in trees and used for resting or rearing their young. During winter they prefer nests in hollow trees. Their behavior, reproduction and longevity are similar to gray squirrels.

Distribution: The range of eastern fox squirrels is from northeast Mexico through the eastern half of the United States into south-central Canada. They are common in oak-hickory woodlands and wooded parks and neighborhoods throughout Kansas.

Food: They feed on nuts, seeds, berries, buds and insects. Occasionally they eat bird eggs and nestlings.



■ *Southern Flying Squirrel*

Measurements:

Total Length: 8-9 inches

Tail Length: 3-5 inches

Weight: 1.6-3 ounces



■ *Plains Pocket Gopher*

Measurements:

Total Length: 9.2-12.6 inches

Tail Length: 2.5-4.1 inches

Weight: 6-10.7 ounces

Southern Flying Squirrel

Glaucomys volans

Comments: Southern flying squirrels live in woodpecker holes and tree cavities. They cannot fly, but they can “glide” up to 300 feet due to a web of skin extending from their front to hind legs. When gliding they appear flat and square with a flattened tail that provides an efficient rudder to control their aerial maneuvers. Before landing the tail flips upward and the squirrel lands, hind feet first, with his head up. Females produce two litters of 1-7 young. Longevity in the wild is up to 6 years.

Distribution: Southern flying squirrels can be found in thickly wooded areas from Central America through the eastern half of the United States and into southeast Canada. They are found in oak-hickory forests in the eastern quarter of Kansas.

Food: Southern flying squirrels forage at night on nuts, seeds, leaf and flower buds, berries, insects, nestling birds, bird eggs and carrion.

Plains Pocket Gopher

Geomys bursarius

Comments: Plains pocket gophers are solitary rodents that spend nearly all their life in a network of underground tunnels, coming out only at night to forage around their entrance and to breed. They are built for digging with strong, clawed front legs. The obvious sign of their presence is a line of dirt piles along the surface of the ground. They have large, external, fur-lined, pocket-like cheek pouches used for hauling food. In spring, 1-6 pups are born. They usually live less than 5 years.

Distribution: Plains pocket gophers range throughout the Great Plains. They are found throughout Kansas in prairies, overgrazed rangelands, parks, golf courses, cemeteries and residential lawns.

Food: Plains pocket gophers feed on forbs, grasses, stems, roots and are particularly fond of alfalfa fields.



■ *Hispid Pocket Mouse*

Measurements:

Total Length: 7.6-9.5 inches

Tail Length: 3-4.6 inches

Weight: 1.4-2.1 ounces



■ *Ord's Kangaroo Rat*

Measurements:

Total Length: 9.8-11 inches

Tail Length: 5.2-6.2 inches

Weight: 1.9-3.3 ounces

Hispid Pocket Mouse

Chaetodipus hispidus

Comments: Hispid pocket mice have external cheek pouches for storing food and are the largest pocket mice in Kansas.

They gather food at night and spend the day in shallow, underground burrows. Their bristly fur is brownish gray on top and white below with a broad yellow-orange band in between. Females produce at least two litters per year with 5-6 young per litter. They can live up to 3 years in the wild.

Distribution: Hispid pocket mice range from central Mexico through the central United States. They are often found in the sand prairies of the western two-thirds of Kansas.

Food: Hispid pocket mice feed on seeds, tender green plants and occasionally insects.

Ord's Kangaroo Rat

Dipodomys ordii

Comments: In kangaroo fashion, excited Ord's kangaroo rats jump on both hind feet using their tail for balance. Their leaps may be 6 feet long and 2 feet high. They have a thick body, short neck, large head and a long tail with a fur tuft at the end. Ord's kangaroo rats forage at night. In dry seasons, they conserve metabolic water by absorbing it from their kidneys and bladder, thus surviving for months without drinking. Their burrows are dug at the base of shrubs, grass clumps or along sandy roadways. Litters of 2-5 young are born in May and September. Their lifespan in the wild is about 1 year.

Distribution: Ord's kangaroo rats are found in sandy, semi-arid regions throughout central Mexico, the Great Plains and the western United States. They live in sandy prairies and overgrazed rangelands in the western half of Kansas.

Food: Ord's kangaroo rats feed on seeds, grains, forbs, grasses, flowers, buds, tubers and insects.



■ *American Beaver*

Measurements:

Total Length: 38-49 inches

Tail Length: 12-16 inches

Weight: 30-60 pounds

American Beaver

Castor canadensis

Comments: American beavers are the largest rodents in Kansas. They use trees, other vegetation and mud to build dams and sometimes their dome-shaped lodges. Most Kansas beavers live in bank burrows along streams and rivers. Beavers have large, orange incisor teeth and strong jaws. They have large, webbed hind feet, a horizontally flattened, scaly tail and coarse brown fur covering gray silky under-fur. Beavers are active throughout the year from dusk to dawn. In the twilight hours they may be observed swimming, their head causing a triangle-shaped wake on the surface of the water. Females bear a litter of 3-4 kits in May or June. They may live up to 15 years in the wild.

Distribution: American beavers are found in aquatic habitats from northern Mexico to Alaska. They are found in Kansas wherever there is water and a source of edible trees.

Food: Beavers feed on rhizomes, roots and shoots of aquatic plants and leaves and twigs of trees in warm months. They cache tree branches underwater next to their den site in winter allowing them to access their food even during ice cover.



■ *Western Harvest Mouse*

Measurements:

Total Length: 4.7-6.2 inches

Tail Length: 2.2-3.1 inches

Weight: 0.4-0.6 ounces



■ *Deer Mouse*

Measurements:

Total Length: 5-6.6 inches

Tail Length: 1.7-2.9 inches

Weight: 0.7-0.9 ounces

Western Harvest Mouse

Reithrodontomys megalotis

Comments: Western harvest mice resemble house mice and are sometimes seen when hay is harvested. They harvest seeds from sunset to midnight by climbing grass stalks and shrubs. Their soft fur is brownish on top, grayish on the sides and white below. Females produce up to seven litters per year with 3-5 young per litter. They usually live less than a year in the wild.

Distribution: Western harvest mice range from southern Mexico through the western half of the United States. They are found in prairies and uncultivated croplands in Kansas.

Food: Western harvest mice feed on seeds of grasses and wildflowers, young plants and insect larvae. They consume up to one-third of their weight per day.

Deer Mouse

Peromyscus maniculatus

Comments: Foraging at night, deer mice are known to cache their food in bird nests, mattresses, shoes and teapots. Their fur is reddish-brown on their back and white on their belly. They have large hairless ears, white feet and a bicolored tail. Females can produce up to 10 litters per year with 4-5 young per liter. Deer mice are common prey for most predators. Their maximum lifespan is 2 years.

Distribution: Deer mice are the most widespread rodents in North America, living in many different habitats from Mexico to Alaska. They are found in woodlands, shrublands and prairies in Kansas.

Food: Deer mice feed on green vegetation, nuts, berries, fruits, seeds and insects.



■ *Northern Grasshopper Mouse*

Measurements:

Total Length: 5.4-6.4 inches

Tail Length: 1.5-2 inches

Weight: 1.1-1.6 ounces



■ *Hispid Cotton Rat*

Measurements:

Total Length: 8-14 inches

Tail Length: 3.5-5 inches

Weight: 2-9 ounces

Northern Grasshopper Mouse

Onychomys leucogaster

Comments: Because of their strong social bonds, predatory life style and loud, high pitched howls, northern grasshopper mice have been compared to large carnivores like wolves. They mark their territories with strong scent and vigorously attack intruders. They have a short tail, robust body and soft, silky fur. They feed at night and spend most of the day in underground burrows. From spring to early fall they produce 2-3 litters of 2-6 young and live up to 3 years in the wild.

Distribution: Northern grasshopper mice are found in arid and semiarid regions ranging from Mexico through central and western United States and into Canada. They are most often found in dry, sandy grasslands and shrublands of the western two-thirds of Kansas.

Food: Northern grasshopper mice are the most carnivorous of mice species. Eighty percent of their diet consists of grasshoppers and other insects, 10 percent rodents and the remaining 10 percent includes seeds and other plant materials.

Hispid Cotton Rat

Sigmodon hispidus

Comments: Hispid cotton rats forage at dusk and dawn and rarely store their food. Their bristly fur is yellowish-brown with flecks of black and gray on top and whitish-gray below. Unlike other rats their tails are relatively short. Females can produce many litters from spring through fall with 7-9 young per litter. Average lifespan in the wild is less than one year.

Distribution: Hispid cotton rats range from South America to the southeast and south-central United States. They live in prairies, uncultivated croplands, shrublands and wetlands of Kansas.

Food: Hispid cotton rats feed on grass stems, leaves, seeds, grains, cotton, insects and small vertebrates, including mice and fledgling birds.



■ *Eastern Woodrat*

Measurements:

Total Length: 12-16 inches

Tail Length: 5-7 inches

Weight: 10-14 ounces



■ *Prairie Vole*

Measurements:

Total Length: 5.5-7.2 inches

Tail Length: 1-1.8 inches

Weight: 1.7-2.5 ounces

Eastern Woodrat

Neotoma floridana

Comments: Eastern woodrats resemble a large mouse and are grayish-brown with a white throat, belly, feet and a furry tail. They build their nests in rock ledges, tree bases, brush piles, fencerows, old buildings and abandoned vehicles. Typical nests are cone-shaped, 4 feet across and 3 feet high. Due to their habit of storing small “treasures” in their stick nests, woodrats are often called “pack rats.” These treasures might include shiny bottle caps, pieces of colored glass and empty shotgun shells. Two litters of 3-4 young are produced between February and September. Maximum longevity is 3 years.

Distribution: Eastern woodrats range from southeast to mid-central United States. They can be found in woodlands throughout Kansas.

Food: Eastern woodrats feed on buds, leaves, bark, nuts, fruits, berries, forbs and dry mushrooms.

Prairie Vole

Microtus ochrogaster

Comments: Prairie voles are a major food source for many of the large, predatory mammals of Kansas. These mice have black and white “peppery” fur with a yellowish tinge on the belly. They construct runways at the soil’s surface where they forage during the night then retreat to a network of tunnels below ground to store collected food. Females produce about four litters of 3-4 young per year. Their average life span is less than a year.

Distribution: Prairie voles range throughout the prairies of the United States and Canada. They are found in large numbers in grasslands and fallow croplands throughout Kansas.

Food: Prairie voles feed on grasses, forbs, seeds, roots and rhizomes.



■ *Common Muskrat*

Measurements:

Total Length: 19-23 inches

Tail Length: 8-10 inches

Weight: 1.5-3.5 pounds

Common Muskrat

Ondatra zibethicus

Comments: Common muskrats are water-dwelling rodents. Well adapted to aquatic life, they have partially webbed feet, a vertically flattened scaly tail and dense, waterproof fur. Their cone-shaped “houses” made of damp vegetation can be 5 feet across and 4 feet high. They also construct bank burrows with underwater entries. Muskrats forage mostly in the twilight hours and at night. They are often mistaken for small beavers when swimming. Tracks show footprints with a tail drag mark. Females can bear up to three litters per year with 2-9 kits per litter. Maximum longevity in the wild is 4 years.

Distribution: Common muskrats live in nearly all aquatic habitats from the southern United States through Alaska. They are found throughout Kansas in marshlands, ponds, lakes and slow moving rivers and streams.

Food: Common muskrats feed on aquatic plants, fish, crayfish, snails, mussels and occasionally on eggs and young birds.



■ *North American Porcupine*

Measurements:

Total Length: 25-34 inches

Tail Length: 7-11 inches

Weight: 27-33 pounds

North American Porcupine

Erethizon dorsatum

Comments: North American porcupines are heavy bodied, yellowish-black rodents that move with a slow waddling gait. On the Great Plains, they are the second largest rodent, behind only the beaver. They have reddish-orange incisor teeth, poor eyesight and curved claws. As many as 30,000 yellowish-white quills are hidden within the fur of their back, rump and tail, but are absent from their belly. Porcupines make their dens in hollow trees, small caves or under rock ledges and are good climbers. They are solitary and generally forage at night. When challenged, they arch their back and slap the aggressor with their heavily-quilled tail. Usually, a single cub is born in April or May. They may live 20 years in the wild.

Distribution: North American porcupines range from northern Mexico to Alaska. They inhabit wooded areas in central and southwestern Kansas.

Food: They feed on the tender bark in the tops of cottonwood trees and on grasses, forbs, alfalfa and corn.



■ Coyote

Measurements:

Total Length: 46-52 inches

Tail Length: 13-15 inches

Weight: 28-35 pounds

Coyote

Canis latrans

Comments: Coyotes are incredibly adaptable and are found in nearly all habitats of North America. They live alone, in pairs or packs. Home ranges can be as large as 25 square miles. They are vocal and shortly after nightfall may howl to indicate their location, claim their territory, reinforce social bonds or simply because they enjoy howling. Pairs sometimes mate for life. Their den sites include cavities under rock ledges, hollow logs, shrub thickets and dens abandoned by other mammals. They may use several dens when rearing pups. Litters of 4-7 pups are born in spring. They can live up to 10 years in the wild.

Distribution: Coyotes range from South America through Alaska. They occupy all habitats in Kansas.

Food: Coyotes hunt from dusk to dawn for rabbits, mice, rats, squirrels and ground nesting birds. They also eat plant matter, including fruits and berries. They will scavenge dead livestock and kill poultry, small livestock, cats and small dogs.



■ *Swift Fox*

Measurements:

Total Length: 31-33 inches

Tail Length: 10.8-11.2 inches

Weight: 5.1-5.3 pounds

Swift Fox

Vulpes velox

Comments: Swift foxes are the smallest member of the dog family in North America. Adults weigh less than typical house cats. Resembling small coyotes, they have a slender body, long, pointed ears and a bushy tail with a black tip. Swift foxes live in underground dens with several tunnels, rooms and entrances. Separate chambers are used for sleeping and storing food. Hunting usually occurs at night. Litters of 3-6 pups are born in late winter and early spring. They may live 5 years in the wild. Their most notorious predators are coyotes.

Distribution: Swift foxes are found in arid and semi-arid regions from Mexico to southern Canada. They are found in the shortgrass prairies and rangelands in the western third of Kansas.

Food: They feed on rabbits, hares, mice, rats, ground squirrels, insects, birds and small reptiles.



■ *Red Fox*

Measurements:

Total Length: 38-42 inches

Tail Length: 12-15 inches

Weight: 8-10 pounds

Red Fox

Vulpes vulpes

Comments: Red foxes are smaller than coyotes and larger than swift foxes. They have a bright, rusty-red coat with a white belly, white chin and a bushy, red tail with a white tip. They dig dens in wooded hillsides or stream banks or use dens constructed by other mammals. They hunt alone from dusk to dawn and are noted for their comical “mouse leap,” where they spring straight up and pounce with all four feet on their rodent prey. Litters of 4-9 pups are born in late winter or early spring. They may live up to 10 years in the wild.

Distribution: Red foxes are the most widely distributed carnivore in the world and found in North America, Europe, North Africa and Asia. They are found in all but the western quarter of the United States and occupy nearly all of Canada and Alaska. They are most commonly found in woodlands and shrublands throughout Kansas. They may inhabit urban areas along river corridors and highway interchanges. Coyotes will catch and kill red foxes.

Food: Red foxes feed on rabbits, hares, mice, rats, insects, ground nesting birds, carrion, fruits, berries, garbage and poultry.



■ *Raccoon*

Measurements:

Total Length: 26-38 inches

Tail Length: 8-12 inches

Weight: 12-27 pounds

Raccoon

Procyon lotor

Comments: The name raccoon is derived from the Algonquin Indian word “arathkone” meaning “one who can scratch with their hands.” Raccoons are noted for “washing” their food in water. Most people recognize them by their black mask and ringed tail. They are intelligent and extremely curious. Their dens are located in hollow trees, cavities below rock ledges, under old farm buildings and in chimneys. They forage alone during the night, often within a square mile. Sows bear litters of 3-7 kits in the spring and raise them alone. In the wild they live up to 6 years.

Distribution: Raccoons range from South America to southern Canada. They are found in woodlands, both rural and urban, throughout Kansas. They are usually more abundant near agricultural areas.

Food: Raccoons are omnivores with more than half of their diet being plant matter. They eat fruits, berries, nuts, grains, insects, fish, frogs, small turtles, crayfish, snails, mussels, mice, birds and eggs. They also raid garbage cans.



■ *American Mink*

Measurements:

Total Length: 20-27 inches

Tail Length: 6-10 inches

Weight: 1.5-3 pounds

American Mink

Mustela vison

Comments: American mink are long and slender with short legs. They have soft, brown fur with white spots on their chin, throat or chest and a tail with a bushy tip. They make their dens beneath riverbank tree roots, in hollow trees and logs and in abandoned muskrat and beaver dens. They are excellent swimmers that search for prey in or near water from dusk to dawn. Females bear litters of 4-5 kits in early summer. Their longevity in the wild can reach 6 years.

Distribution: American mink are found from the eastern two-thirds of the United States through Canada and most of Alaska. They are found statewide in Kansas near aquatic habitats, but less common in the western third of the state.

Food: American mink feed on fish, crayfish, snails, mussels, frogs, snakes, muskrats, mice and rabbits.



■ *American Badger*

Measurements:

Total Length: 26-32 inches

Tail Length: 4-6 inches

Weight: 10-16 pounds

American Badger

Taxidea taxus

Comments: Pound for pound, American badgers are likely the most powerful mammals in Kansas. They have stout, flattened bodies, powerful forelegs with large, re-curved claws, strong jaw muscles, short ears and a short, furry tail. If threatened, they attack explosively with hissing, growling and biting. They inhabit open country and are frequently found with colonial rodents, especially prairie dogs. They dig their dens in hillsides and road embankments leaving a conspicuous dirt mound at the entrance. Except during the mating season, badgers are solitary. Females bear a litter of 1-5 young in late spring. Badgers can live 12-14 years but few make it past 2 years in the wild.

Distribution: American badgers are found from southern Mexico through the western two-thirds of the United States into southwest Canada.

Food: American badgers feed on pocket gophers, prairie dogs, ground squirrels, mice, rabbits and insects.



■ *Striped Skunk*

Measurements:

Total Length: 22-32 inches

Tail Length: 8-12 inches

Weight: 4-9 pounds

Striped Skunk

Mephitis mephitis

Comments: Stocky and short-legged, striped skunks have long, black fur with a white head patch that extends down the neck and splits into two stripes as it fans toward the tail. Striped skunks usually live in dens excavated by other mammals. They forage alone at night and are common victims of vehicles. They are normally docile and prefer to retreat rather than fight. If provoked, they face the challenger, bend their back and spray them with a mist of musk from two anal glands causing temporary blindness. They can spray accurately up to 12 feet. Females produce litters of 6-7 kits in spring. They can live up to 5 years in the wild.

Distribution: Striped skunks are found from central Mexico to central Canada. They are found throughout Kansas in woodlands, shrublands, prairies and urban areas.

Food: Striped skunks feed on insects, mice, rats, bird eggs, turtle eggs, earthworms, frogs, crayfish, fruits, berries and grain crops.



■ *Bobcat*

Measurements:

Total Length: 33-40 inches

Tail Length: 4-6.5 inches

Weight: 8-22 pounds

Bobcat

Lynx rufus

Comments: Sometimes called “wildcats,” bobcats get their name from their short or “bobbed” tail. They have long legs, toes with retractile claws, dark spotted reddish-brown fur on top and gray fur with black spots on their belly. Their dens are found in brush piles, hollow logs, caves and in rock outcroppings. They hunt alone from dusk to dawn and rarely use the same daytime resting area. Bobcats mark their territories with urine and feces. Females usually bear a single litter of 2-4 kittens in the summer. They may live up to 14 years in the wild.

Distribution: Bobcats have the widest distribution of native cats in North America ranging from southern Mexico to southern Canada. They are found in Kansas shrublands and woodlands.

Food: Half of the diet of bobcats consists of rabbits and hares. They also feed on mice, rats, birds and occasionally on fawns and injured adult deer.



■ *Wapiti*

Measurements:

Total Length: 85-110 inches

Tail Length: 5-6 inches

Weight: 460-1025 pounds

Wapiti

Cervus elaphus

Comments: The Shawnee Indians called elk “wapiti,” meaning “pale rump.” They are the largest member of the deer family in Kansas. They are a light brown below and darker brown across the back. Their rump and tail are straw colored. Mature bulls grow antlers nearly 5 feet long and 5 feet wide in summer and early fall. The antlers are carried through winter and are shed in early spring. In early autumn, “bugling” bulls announce their dominance during the breeding season. The bull’s neck and shoulders swell and sparring bulls may dual over control of a harem of 10-20 cows. Herds congregate together in winter and cows deliver a single calf, usually weighing about 30 pounds, in early June. Wapiti live up to 15 years in the wild.

Distribution: Wapiti formerly ranged throughout the North American continent north of Mexico. Today they are found in prairies, shrublands and woodlands of the Rocky Mountain region of the United States and Canada and the Pacific Northwest. There are a couple of small, free-ranging herds in Kansas.

Food: Wapiti are primarily grazers feeding on grasses and forbs. In the winter they browse on shrubs, bark and twigs.



■ *Mule Deer*

Measurements:

Total Length: 46-72 inches

Tail Length: 5-9 inches

Weight: 110-440 pounds

Mule Deer

Odocoileus hemionus

Comments: Mule deer are gray in color and have a short, black-tipped tail and large ears. When alarmed they are famous for running and springing with all four feet hitting the ground simultaneously. Males have antlers, with characteristic Y-shaped forks, that start growing in spring and are shed in late winter. The breeding season, or rut, peaks in late October and early November. Does usually deliver twin fawns in late May or early June weighing on average 8 pounds each. In the wild they can live up to 15 years.

Distribution: Mule deer range from central Mexico through the western half of the United States into western Canada and southern Alaska. They were once abundant in the shrublands and riparian woodlands of the western two-thirds of Kansas. Nearly extirpated in Kansas by 1900, they are now present in the rolling hills and breaks of the western third of the state.

Food: Mule deer are primarily browsers feeding on shrubs and tree twigs usually at dusk and dawn. They also feed on grasses, forbs, grains crops and alfalfa.



■ *White-tailed Deer*

Measurements:

Total Length: 54-86 inches

Tail Length: 6-14 inches

Weight: 90-275 pounds

White-tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus

Comments: White-tailed deer are smaller and more numerous than mule deer in Kansas. They have relatively short ears and are tawny brown in color. Their bushy tail, brown above and white below, “flags” from side to side when they are running. Whitetails are excellent swimmers, can run 35 miles per hour and jump an 8-foot fence. During severe winters whitetails gather in areas near abundant food and cover. Bucks have antlers with 3-6 unforked points on each beam. Antlers start growing in spring and are shed in late winter. The peak of the whitetail breeding season, or rut, occurs in November. Young does usually have one fawn in May or June while twins are usually the norm in older does and triplets aren’t uncommon. Each fawn weighs about 5 pounds. They can live up to 15 years in the wild. They are the most popular big game mammal in the United States.

Distribution: White-tailed deer range from northern South America to Canada. They are typically found in woodlands or riparian corridors throughout Kansas.

Food: White-tailed deer feed mostly at dawn and dusk on leaves, stems, buds and bark. They also eat acorns, grain crops and alfalfa.



■ *Pronghorn*

Measurements:

Total Length: 50-60 inches

Tail Length: 4-7 inches

Weight: 100-155 pounds

Pronghorn

Antilocapra americana

Comments: Often called “antelope” the pronghorn is the only member of the family Antilocapridae. The buck’s black horns are forked or “pronged.” Females may be hornless or have smaller horns with no forks. The hardened sheath covering of each horn is shed in late winter. A pronghorn’s coarse hair contains air pockets, which provides insulation against the cold. The combination of keen eyesight and their ability to run up to 60 miles per hour allow them to elude potential predators. They rarely jump fences but prefer to crawl under them. They browse in small herds during the summer but form larger herds in winter. Twin births are the rule with does delivering fawns weighing up to 7 pounds in late May or early June. They may live up to 10 years in the wild.

Distribution: Pronghorns were found in numbers second only to bison in the Great Plains from Mexico to Canada. Pronghorns are now found in the western quarter of Kansas.

Food: Pronghorns feed on sagebrush, cactus, forbs and young, tender grasses.



■ *American Bison*

Measurements:

Total Length: 80-150 inches

Tail Length: 17-33 inches

Weight: 900-2,000 pounds

American Bison

Bison bison

Comments: American bison, or “buffalo,” are the heaviest land mammal native to North America. Prior to settlement an estimated 60 million bison roamed North America. They were a major resource for the Great Plains Indians providing food, shelter, clothing, fuel, tools and dozens of other items essential for survival. The last wild bison in Kansas was killed in 1879 at Point of Rocks north of Elkhart. Bison frequently wallowed in dusty or muddy spots to shed hair and rid themselves of insect and parasite pests. Thousands of these saucer-shaped “buffalo wallows,” some 30 feet across and more than 2 feet deep, are still visible today. Bison breed from early July to late September. Cows usually deliver one reddish calf weighing up to 35 pounds in April or May. They can live up to 30 years.

Distribution: Bison were originally found from Mexico to Canada and throughout much of the United States but most numerous in the Great Plains. Public and private captive herds are scattered across Kansas. The best viewing opportunities exist at Maxwell Wildlife Refuge near Canton and Finney Game Refuge near Garden City.

Food: Bison are grazers feeding on a variety of grasses and forbs.

Mammal Tracks



H: 2"-3.5" F: 2.5"-4"

Dog

H: 1.7" F: 1.7"

Swift Fox



H: 2" F: 2.3"

Red Fox

H: 2.3" F: 2.5"

Coyote

H: 1.3" F: 1.5"

House Cat



H: 2" F: 2"

Bobcat

H: 3" F: 3"

Mountain Lion

H: 1.7" F: 1.3"

American Mink



H: 2" F: 1.8"
**Nine-banded
Armadillo**

H: 2" F: 1.5"
**Virginia
Opossum**

H: 2" F: 2.3"
Striped Skunk



H: 2" F: 2.5"
**American
Badger**



H: 4" F: 2.5"
**Northern
Raccoon**



H&F: 3-4.9"
Elk



H: 3" F: 2.5"
**White-tailed
Deer**



H: 1.6" F: 1.6"
Pronghorn



H: 2.7" F: 1.5"
**Eastern Fox
Squirrel**



H: 2.6" F: 1"
**Common
Muskrat**



H: 2.5" F: 1.5"
**Black-tailed
Jackrabbit**



H: 3" F: 1"
**Eastern
Cottontail**



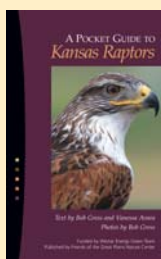
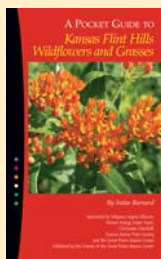
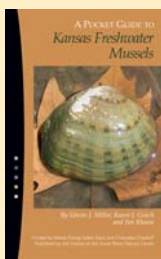
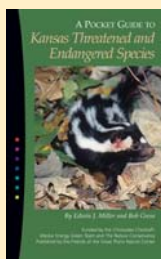
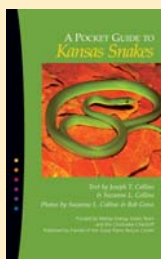
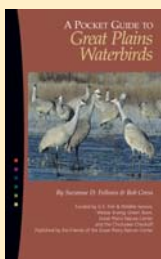
H: 7" F: 3.5"
**American
Beaver**

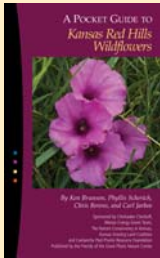


H: 3.9" F: 3.3"
**North
American
Porcupine**

Pocket Guides

Bob Gress, Editor





Single copies of these Pocket Guides may be picked up free at the Great Plains Nature Center. Copies can be mailed for \$3.00 each by sending your check, payable to GPNC, to: Pocket Guides, Great Plains Nature Center, 6232 East 29th Street North, Wichita, KS 67220.

Great Plains Nature Center

The Great Plains Nature Center is a cooperative project between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks and the City of Wichita Department of Park and Recreation. The Nature Center features the Koch Habitat Hall, Owl's Nest Gift Shop, Coleman Auditorium and 2 miles of Chisholm Creek Park nature trails. For more information visit the Great Plains Nature Center web site at www.gpnc.org. Please visit or contact us at: Great Plains Nature Center, 6232 East 29th Street North, Wichita, KS 67220. Phone: (316) 683-5499.

Chickadee Checkoff

The Chickadee Checkoff program is a voluntary donation program for nongame projects sponsored by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism. Kansas taxpayers are able to contribute on their individual state income tax form. Donations can also be made by sending a check to Chickadee Checkoff Program, 512 SE 25th Ave., Pratt, KS 67124. Since 1980, the Chickadee Checkoff program has distributed over \$4 million to projects that help endangered species, assist in reintroduction efforts of sensitive species, supports wildlife education projects at schools and nature centers, and supports hundreds of other nongame conservation projects.

Glenn Springs Holdings Inc. / Occidental Chemical Corporation

Glenn Springs Holdings, Inc. (GSHI) manages environmental restoration projects for Occidental Petroleum Corporation. Our scientists, engineers and managers are dedicated to preserving the environment. Lands once degraded by industrial activities are remediated to restore natural habitat and nourish wildlife.

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Petroleum Corporation, manufactures vinyls and specialty chemical products, plus chlorine and caustic soda – the building blocks of pharmaceuticals, water disinfectants and detergents. OxyChem endeavors to safeguard the environment, protect the safety and health of employees and neighboring communities.

Oxy's Wichita Plant has a 440-acre Prairie Wetland Conservation Area consisting of wetlands and native grasses. The site is home to numerous wildlife and is certified as a Wildlife at Work site and as a Corporate Lands for Learning site by the Wildlife Habitat Council.

Westar Energy Green Team

Westar Energy, Inc. is the largest utility in Kansas serving nearly 700,000 customers with about 35,000 miles of transmission and distribution lines. Since 1989, their employees have operated an environmental team. The Green Team members volunteer hours to improve wildlife habitat through wetland creation and restoration and native grass and tree planting. They build bridges and trails and work to protect and reintroduce sensitive plant and animal species. The Green Team can be contacted at 785-575-8125 or at Ben.Postlethwait@Westarenergy.com.

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