

Mammals

Some four dozen species of mammals maintain breeding populations, probably occur, or may occur occasionally in the watershed. The comments associated with their mentions in what follows will give a good idea of the category into which each species falls. No attempt is made here to include complete ecological or life history information; such knowledge can be gotten elsewhere. Please note that the big, obvious things such as deer and woodchucks do not begin to define the mammal fauna. About half the watershed species can be put comfortably into one's pocket. This is in some ways the more interesting half of the assemblage, because less is known in general about the ecology and life history of its members.

Many of the animals listed here are rarely, if ever, seen by casual strollers, although they may be very common or abundant. Some are crepuscular (active near dawn and dusk) or nocturnal. Some are secretive. Most are alarmed by the passage of hikers, who seem unable to proceed in groups smaller than two do and without vocal socialization. Go alone, or with a quiet companion, to suitable habitat late or early in the day. Sit silently on a rock or log, be patient, look carefully, and listen for small sounds. The creatures will reveal themselves to you.

The occurrence of many of the smaller mammals within the watershed has not been confirmed. Their inclusion here is based on known distributional ranges that include the Damariscotta Lake region. Any definite occurrences should be reported to the office, preferably with specimens in hand, or otherwise confirmed. In determining what should be included here, and at what level of confidence, I have benefited from discussions with Karen Morris, small mammal specialist with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, and with local naturalists Joe Gray and Mark Hatch.

The gray wolf and the eastern cougar may pass through the watershed on occasion, or may not. There are gaps in our knowledge of bat distributions. In particular, look for the small-footed myotis and the eastern pipistrelle. Shrews are very abundant, but it is not easy to separate the smaller species, especially the pygmy and masked shrews. The southern flying squirrel, the gray fox, and the Virginia opossum, all now believed to be confined to southern Maine, may be moving northward. Keep an eye out for them.

Domestic dogs and cats are not listed, although they play an ecological role that can be important, especially when they establish feral populations. This is more likely to occur with cats than with dogs, but free-ranging pets of either kind can do serious damage to local wildlife. The destruction wrought by cats on a national scale is almost unbelievable. Those resident in my house have, over the years, presented me the corpses of thirteen small mammal species.

In the list that follows, common names are given in boldface, Latin names in italics. Weights of typical adults are given for each species, to emphasize both the small size of so many of them and the great range of sizes represented by the fauna. The metric

system is used to avoid the need for small fractions of an ounce for some species; 29 grams equal 1 ounce, and a kilogram equals 2.2 pounds.

- **Opossums:**

Virginia opossum, *Didelphis virginiana*. A more southern species that, like many others, has been extending its range northward. This migration is the result of both more benign climate and changing land use practices. One seen in South Bristol in the early 1970's, but probably still confined to the extreme southern part of the state. Solitary, secretive, and nocturnal. Active year round, less so in winter. 3 kg.

- **Shrews:**

Masked shrew, *Sorex cinereus*. Very common, ubiquitous in moist situations. Active day and night, year round. Has no obvious mask, despite its name. A small shrew, about 4 gm.

Water shrew, *Sorex palustris*. Usually near water, flowing or standing. Not often found, but may be common in appropriate habitat. Active year round. A large shrew, about 15 gm.

Smoky shrew, *Sorex fumeus*. Common in damp, shady woods. Active year round. 8 gm.

Pygmy shrew, *Sorex hoyi*. Possibly quite common, in woodland and along forest edges, but tiny. Our smallest mammal, at 2-3 gm. (A dime weighs 2.6 gm.). Active day and night, year round.

Short-tailed shrew, *Blarina brevicauda*. Very common, ubiquitous in moist situations. Often seen crossing roads. Year round, day and night, but less active in winter. Our largest shrew, about 20 gm.

- **Moles:**

Hairy-tailed mole, *Parascalops breweri*. Probably common in light, well-drained forest and meadow soils. Active day and night, year round, but in deep burrows in winter. 50 gm.

Star-nosed mole, *Condylura cristata*. Common, in wet soils or in water. Active day and night, year round, sometimes tunneling through snow. The fleshy "star" on the snout is apparently an electrical sense organ, used to locate prey. 52 gm.

- **Bats:**

Most check lists include eight species of bats for Maine, but these are state-wide lists. Possibly only six species occur in the watershed. Three of these – the silver-haired, hoary, and eastern red bats – migrate to the central and southeastern states for the winter. The others hibernate in caves, abandoned mines, and unheated buildings. All are nocturnal.

Little brown bat, *Myotis lucifugus*. Very common, often in or near buildings. Most active in the evening. Hibernates October to April. 7 gm.

Northern myotis, *Myotis septentrionalis*. Common, in forests or in or near buildings. Most active in the evening. Hibernates October to April. 7 gm.

Small-footed myotis, *Myotis leibii*. Rare, possibly absent; prefers mountainous regions. Little known. Hibernates November to March. 5 gm.

Big brown bat, *Eptesicus fuscus*. Common, near hollow trees and buildings. Most active in evening. Hibernates November to March, occasionally flies in winter. A large bat, up to 30 gm.

Eastern pipistrelle, *Pipistrellus subflavus*. Probably restricted to extreme southern Maine. Flies early in the evening. Hibernates November to April or May. 5 gm.

Silver-haired bat, *Lasionycteris noctivagans*. Common, in wooded areas near water. Often flies before sunset. Migrates September to April. 10 gm.

Eastern red bat, *Lasiurus borealis*. Common; near trees, over water, or around lights. Active in early evening. Migrates October to April. 13 gm.

Hoary bat, *Lasiurus cinereus*. Uncommon; in woodland, preferably coniferous. Migrates August to April. 30 gm.

- **Rabbits and hares:**

Snowshoe hare, *Lepus americanus*. Very common, in woodlands. Mainly nocturnal, active year round. Becomes white in winter. 1.5-2 kg.

- **Squirrels**

Eastern chipmunk, *Tamias striatus*. Very common. Along forest edges, stone walls, brushy areas. Digs extensive burrow systems. Diurnal. Hibernates erratically November to March, but may be active on warm winter days. 100 gm.

Woodchuck, *Marmota monax*. Common, but becoming less so as farmland reverts to forest. In meadows and forest edges with dry soil. Digs extensive burrows; also swims and climbs trees well. Diurnal. Hibernates October to February. 3-5 kg.

Eastern gray squirrel, *Sciurus carolinensis*. Very common. In hardwood or mixed forests. Diurnal; arboreal, but often on the ground. Uses both nest cavities and leaf nests. Active year round. 500 gm.

Red squirrel, *Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*. Very common. In softwood or mixed forests. Diurnal; arboreal, but often on the ground. Uses both nest cavities and leaf nests. Active year round. 200 gm.

Northern flying squirrel, *Glaucomys sabrinus*. Common, but not often seen because of its nocturnal habits. A big-eyed beauty. In forests, often on the ground at night. Uses winter cavity nests, summer leaf nests. Active year round. 110 gm.

Southern flying squirrel, *Glaucomys volans*. Rare or absent, probably restricted to extreme southern Maine. In deciduous or mixed forests. Nests in cavities. Active year round. Must be viewed in hand to distinguish from northern flying squirrel. 65 gm.

- **Beavers:**

American beaver, *Castor canadensis*. Uncommon, localized. In beaver flowages; a consummate dam builder. Mainly crepuscular and nocturnal, active year round. 20-30 kg.

- **Jumping mice:**

These two rodents are our hibernating champions, passing fully half the year, mid-October to mid-April, dormant. Both dwell in burrows.

Meadow jumping mouse, *Zapus hudsonicus*. Common, in moist, shrubby fields and meadows, and in woods if woodland jumping mouse is absent. Strongly attracted to patches of touch-me-not (*Impatiens capensis*). Mainly nocturnal, but occasionally active by day. 15-20 gm.

Woodland jumping mouse, *Napaeozapus insignis*. Common, in moist woodlands and near water. A truly handsome creature in red-gold raiment with white and brown accents. 20-25 gm.

- **New world rats and mice:**

Deer mouse, *Peromyscus maniculatus*. Very common, usually in woodlands but will enter houses. Nocturnal. Nests in almost any available cavity. Active year round. 20 gm. Even with specimens in hand, it is not easy to tell the deer mouse from the white-footed mouse, but both are attractive little rodents.

White-footed mouse, *Peromyscus leucopus*. Very common, in woodland edges and brushy areas. This is the one most likely to cache nuts and seeds in boots and boxes; can be a nuisance. Nocturnal. Active year round. 20 gm.

Southern red-backed vole, *Clethrionomys gapperi*. Very common. In cool, shaded woodlands, often along stone walls. One of our most abundant small mammals. Active day and night, year round. 20 gm.

Meadow vole, *Microtus pennsylvanicus*. Very common. Often called field mouse. Makes runways through grass in fields and marshes. Active day and night, year round. A big mouse, 30 gm.

Common muskrat, *Ondatra zibethicus*. Common, aquatic. In marshes and other shallow waters. Builds lodges of cattails or other aquatic plants. Active day and night, but primarily nocturnal; year round. Up to 2 kg.

- **Old world rats and mice:**

Norway rat, *Rattus norvegicus*. Common around farms and dumps, not otherwise. In burrows or bulky nests. Destructive and unloved. Mainly nocturnal, year round. 400 gm.

House mouse, *Mus musculus*. Locally common, but less so than white-footed and deer mice, with which it may be confused. In nests in buildings, burrows in fields. Destructive. Mainly nocturnal, year round. 20 gm.

- **Porcupines:**

Porcupine, *Erethizon dorsatum*. Common, arboreal, in coniferous or mixed forests. Uses winter dens, active year round, mainly nocturnal. Feeding signs – cut twigs, stripped bark, pruned branches – are often evident. 6 kg.

- **Dogs, wolves, and coyotes:**

Coyote, *Canis latrans*. Uncommon. In fields and open woodlands. Active day and night, mainly near dawn and dusk. Vocal. Use maternal dens, otherwise not. Eastern coyotes are larger than those of the west; 20 kg.

Gray wolf, *Canis lupus*. Rare, possible occasional visitor. Well-confirmed sightings are needed, with photographs or physical evidence. Difficult to distinguish among large dogs, coyotes, and wolves under most field conditions. Probably no breeding population in Maine. 50 kg.

Red fox, *Vulpes vulpes*. Relatively common; not in deep woods, but otherwise ubiquitous. Uses burrows. Active day and night, mainly near dawn and dusk; year round. 5 kg.

Gray fox, *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*. Probably absent from the watershed. Restricted to southern Maine, but may move northward as field reverts to forest. Climbs trees. Uses maternal dens in burrows or hollow trees. Mainly crepuscular and nocturnal; year round. 5 kg.

- **Raccoons:**

Common raccoon, *Procyon lotor*. Common. In woods, wetlands, and settled areas. Active day and night, but mainly nocturnal. Does not hibernate, but winter sleeps for a month or two during coldest weather. Raccoons carry rabies, canine distemper, tularemia, and some parasites which are inimical to humans. Forget “cute”; they should not be encouraged to feed near houses. 8 kg.

- **Bears:**

Black bear, *Ursus americanus*. Rare, possible occasional visitor; less frequent since open dumps were replaced by transfer stations. In secluded woodlands. Active day and night, but mainly near dawn and dusk. Hibernates October to April; young are born during dormant period. 200 kg.

- **Weasels and allies:**

Fisher, *Martes pennanti*. Not common. In coniferous and mixed forest with closed canopy; climbs well. Maternity dens in hollow trees, temporary dens in any protected site. Active day and night, year round. 4-5 kg.

Short-tailed weasel, *Mustela erminea*. Relatively common, in forests and brushy areas. Becomes white, except for tail tip, in winter. Usually uses nest burrows of other animals, or natural cavities. Active day and night, year round. 70-110 gm.

Long-tailed weasel, *Mustela frenata*. Relatively common, in thickets, swamps, and woodlands; climbs well. In our portion of its range, may become white, except for tail tip, in winter. Generally uses nest burrows of

other animals, or natural cavities. Active day and night, year round. 120-250 gm.

Mink, *Mustela vison*. Relatively common, in and near wetlands. Dens in natural cavities. Active day and night, but mainly nocturnal; year round. 800 gm.

River otter, *Lutra canadensis*. Not common. Largely aquatic; an excellent swimmer. Dens in lake and stream banks. Mainly diurnal and crepuscular, but secretive. Active year round. 8kg.

- **Skunks:**

Striped skunk, *Mephitis mephitis*. Common, ubiquitous. May make long burrows with two or three chambers. Mainly nocturnal. A winter sleeper, but may be active on warm winter days. 3 kg.

- **Cats and allies:**

Eastern cougar, *Felis concolor*. Rare, at best, but reported from the entire region often enough to bear mention. Well-confirmed sightings are needed, with photographs or physical evidence. Almost surely no breeding population in Maine; any animals present have probably escaped from captivity. Nocturnal, year round. 55 kg.

Bobcat, *Lynx rufus*. Rare, possible visitor rather than resident. Inhabits diverse woodland situations. Dens in rock crevices or hollow logs. Nocturnal and crepuscular; active year round. 7 kg.

- **Deer, elk, and moose:**

White-tailed deer, *Odocoileus virginianus*. Common. In meadows and woodlands. Yards up in winter. Active day and night, but mainly near dawn and dusk. Year round. 90 kg.

Moose, *Alces alces*. Uncommon, occasional visitor. Prefers coniferous forests with swamps or lakes. Active day and night, year round. 500 kg.

- **Suggested reading:**

Blair, W.F., A.P. Blair, P. Brodkorb, F.R. Cagle, and G.A. Moore. 1957. Vertebrates of the United States. McGraw-Hill, New York. 819 pp.

Old, so watch the nomenclature, and technical, but the best single volume I know for U.S. vertebrate identification. Lots of keys.

DeGraff, R.M. and D.D. Rudis. 1986. New England Wildlife: Habitat, Natural History, and Distribution. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Eastern Region. 491 pp.

Concise, with excellent summaries of habitat use.

Murie, O.J. 1954. A Field Guide to Animal Tracks. Houghton Mifflin, Boston. 375 pp.

Very useful. Tracks and other signs, including scats and feeding marks.

Whitaker, J.O., Jr. 1980. The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mammals. Alfred A. Knopf, New York. 745 pp.

Compact, thorough, with good natural history information. Small range maps make New England distributions a little hard to interpret.

Whitaker, J.O., Jr. and W.J. Hamilton, Jr. 1998. Mammals of the Eastern United States. Cornell University Press, Ithaca. 583 pp.

An excellent reference, comprehensive, with lots of ecological and life history information.

Bernie McAlice, January, 2002.

Links: American Society of Mammalogists .

www.mammalsociety.org

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

www.state.me.us/ifw/wildlife

Maine Natural History Digest

www.acadia.net/guest/vfthomas/digest/htm