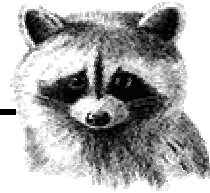




Common Raccoon

Procyon lotor



Known by nicknames such as ring tailed bandit, masked bandit, and night raider, raccoons are opportunistic omnivores that sometimes come into conflict with humans as they take advantage of easy food sources such as garbage cans and bird feeders. Raccoons are members of the Family Procyonidae which includes the cacomistle, kinkajou and coatis.

They are distinguished by a signature black mask surrounding their eyes and a bushy tail with anywhere from four to ten black rings. The forepaws resemble slender human hands and make the raccoon very dexterous. The coloration of the raccoon varies with habitat, and ranges from gray to reddish brown to buff. Raccoons have a stocky build and typically weigh from 10 to 30 pounds with males typically larger than females. Their body length ranges from 2 to 3 ft, including their tail. Raccoons have been known to live a maximum of 16 years in the wild. A captive animal was recorded living for 21 years. The life span of raccoons in the wild is estimated at three to five years. They have keen senses of hearing, sight and touch, but taste and smell are less well developed. Raccoons have dexterous feet, are excellent climbers and can descend a tree head first. They are extremely strong for their size.

Diet

Raccoons are omnivorous and opportunistic animals. Their varied diet includes fleshy fruits, mast (especially acorns, hickory nuts and beechnuts), grains, invertebrates (particularly crayfish and insects), rodents, young rabbits, birds, bird's eggs, turtles, fish, carrion, and crops such as corn. Raccoons have also adapted to eat trash and other food available in suburban and urban areas.

Population

Since the 1800s, expanding human population has probably benefited this species; concentrations of people provide easy access to such food sources as garbage, gardens and bird feeders. Raccoons are now abundant in both urban and rural areas throughout their range

Range

Raccoons are found across southern Canada, throughout most of the United States, and into northern South America. Raccoons prefer wooded areas near streams, ponds and marshes but are highly adaptable and can live in close proximity to human developments and thrive in farmlands, suburban, and urban areas.

Behavior

Raccoons are primarily nocturnal but venture out in the daytime. In late fall and winter, raccoons may "den up" during the coldest periods; however, this is not true hibernation, and they will wander out during warm spells. The den is most often in a hollow tree, but raccoons will also use hollow logs, rock crevices, brush piles, buildings and abandoned woodchuck burrows, beaver lodges or fox dens.

They are solitary animals and the only social group raccoons form consist of a mother and her young. They may den communally, but only one adult male will be present when this occurs.

Although they move slowly, with a shuffle like walk, they can reach speeds of 15 miles per hour on the ground. Raccoons climb with agility and can withstand a drop of 35 feet from a tree. Raccoons are excellent climbers and strong swimmers. They make a variety of sounds including purrs, whimpers, snarls, growls, hisses, screams, and whinnies.

Reproduction

Raccoons breed in late winter or early spring. Male raccoons are polygamous, meaning they will mate with several females in succession. Females, however, are monogamous, and will mate with only one male and will not tolerate other males after mating has occurred.

The young are born after a 63-day gestation period. Females produce one litter per year, with an average of four cubs per litter. The cubs are born blind, helpless and are covered with yellowish-gray fur. After 30 to 40 days, the cubs leave the den and will travel with the female for short distances to search for food. At three to four months, the cubs begin to forage on their own.

Man and Raccoons

Raccoons may serve as host to a number of disease pathogens which are transmissible to humans and domestic animals, including trichinosis, tuberculosis, and round worm. However, most serious is their susceptibility to rabies. Symptoms include unprovoked aggression, impaired movement, paralysis or lack of coordination, unusually friendly behavior and disorientation. However, just because a raccoon is active during the day hours doesn't necessarily mean that it is sick. Never handle a wild or stray animal, especially if it is behaving abnormally, and report sick or strange-acting animals to your local police or animal control officer.

Because of their ability to coexist with humans, raccoons can become a nuisance when they damage gardens, raid garbage cans or inhabit human structures. However, many raccoon problems can be controlled using preventive measures.

Did you know?

- Raccoons live an average of 5 years in the wild.
- Raccoon babies are called kits or cubs.
- The word "raccoon" comes from the Algonquin Indian "*aroughcoune*" which means "he scratches with his hands".
- Their scientific name is "Procyon Lotor". The term "Procyon" means "before dog" and "Lotor" means "washing". Raccoons are known for "washing" whatever they pick up. It is believed that they are not actually washing these things, but kneading and tearing apart the items so they can determine which parts are edible.
- Raccoons are most closely related to the dog (Canidae) and bear (Ursidae) families.
- Raccoons have incredibly sensitive hands and nimble fingers. Nearly as dexterous as a monkey, they can easily open doorknobs and refrigerators.
- Young raccoons are preyed on by coyotes, wolves, hawks, and owls. However, the raccoon is a fierce fighter and when attacked an adult can often fight off predators as large as dogs, bobcats, or wolves.
- One way a raccoon will catch its food is that it will sit on a rock with its tail in the water. The tail provides a nice spot for crayfish to hide and when the raccoon feels something he flips up his tail and catches the crayfish
- A raccoon named Rebecca lived in the White House with President Calvin Coolidge, our 30th president. He used to walk her around the grounds on a leash.