

On T.R.A.C.K.S.

Teaching Resource Activities and Conservation to Kansas Students



Vol. 17, No. 1

Kansas Wildlife & Parks

Fall, 2006

Mammal Champions of Kansas



INSIDE...

Small But Mighty	2
Flying Mammals	3
Rodent Roundup	4
Underground Mammals	6
Wild Dogs	7
Olympic Feats	8
Big & Burlly	9
Offspring Oddities	10
Family Biggest	11
Not The Average Defense	12
Endangered Mammals	13
Quiz	14

Don't Miss
Our Next
Issue:

Animal
Look Alikes

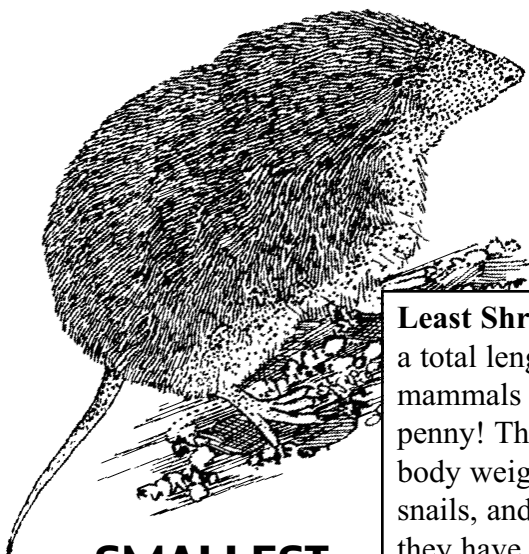
Mammals are, by far, the most familiar animals to us. After all, who knows mammals better than ourselves--the most influential mammal on the planet. There are over 4,000 living species of mammals in the world but only about 88 species are found in Kansas. There is great variety among our mammals and this issue of On TRACKS attempts to showcase the “Animal Champions” of the mammal world in Kansas.



SMALLEST CARNIVORE

The **Least Weasel** is the smallest living carnivore in North America. Showing the typical weasel shape, this mouse-sized animal is less than 10 inches long and weighs no more than 2 ounces! But, its appetite is big! Least weasels eat more than half their body weight each day--that is the equivalent of 1 to 1 1/2 mice a day! This weasel also can have a completely white coat in the winter to help it blend in with the winter environment.

SMALL BUT MIGHTY



SMALLEST MAMMAL

Least Shrews are the smallest mammals in Kansas. At a total length of just under 3 1/2 inches, these tiny mammals weigh about 1/10 of an ounce--the same as 1 penny! They have a mighty appetite and may eat their body weight everyday in food! They eat mostly insects, snails, and earthworms. To help keep their food fresh, they have a poison in their saliva that paralyzes the victim but keeps it alive for days until it is eaten. They also employ a type of “echolocation” to locate food in their subterranean habitat!

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

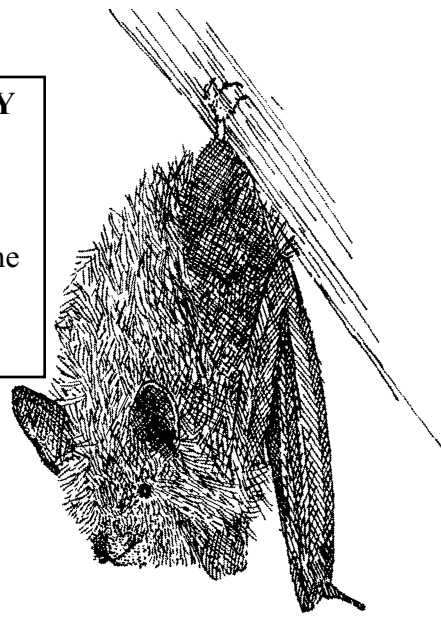
Why is the least weasel the smallest carnivore but the least shrew is not? In mammals, the word “carnivore” refers to the **order Carnivora** or flesh-eating mammals.

The least shrew belongs in the **order Insectivora** or insect-eating mammals!



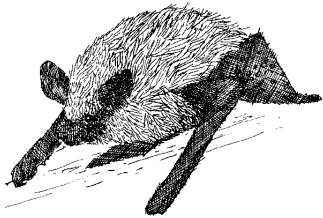
MOST COMMON BAT

Bats are the only mammal that can **TRULY** fly! The **Big Brown Bat** is probably the most common bat in Kansas. They feed at night on insects they catch on the wing using echolocation. Beetles are probably the main insects eaten. Females form nursery colonies in early April.



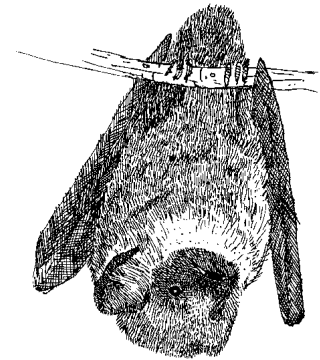
SMALLEST BAT

The **Eastern Pipistrelle** is the smallest bat in Kansas and only slightly bigger than the least shrew! It weighs in at 1/10 to 1/5 of an ounce with a maximum length of 3 1/2 inches.



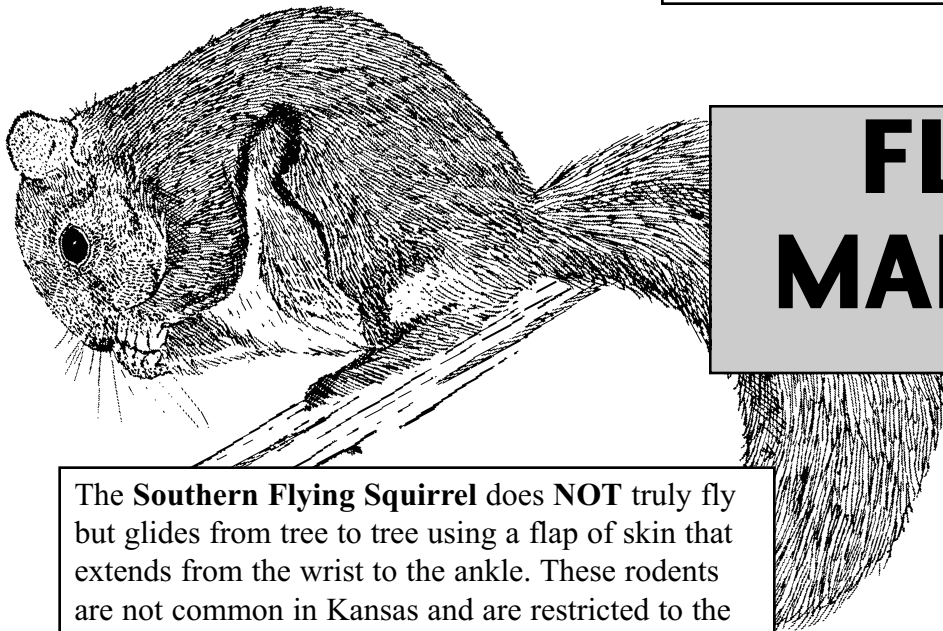
LARGEST BAT

The **Hoary Bat** is the largest bat in Kansas. It may reach a total length of nearly 6 inches and weigh up to 1 1/2 ounces. This bat is a “tree” bat that prefers to roost from tree branches by its hind feet.



FLYING MAMMALS

The **Southern Flying Squirrel** does **NOT** truly fly but glides from tree to tree using a flap of skin that extends from the wrist to the ankle. These rodents are not common in Kansas and are restricted to the eastern third of the state where oak and hickory trees are abundant. Some flying squirrels may glide as far as 150 feet before landing and may take leaps from as high as 60 feet above the ground.



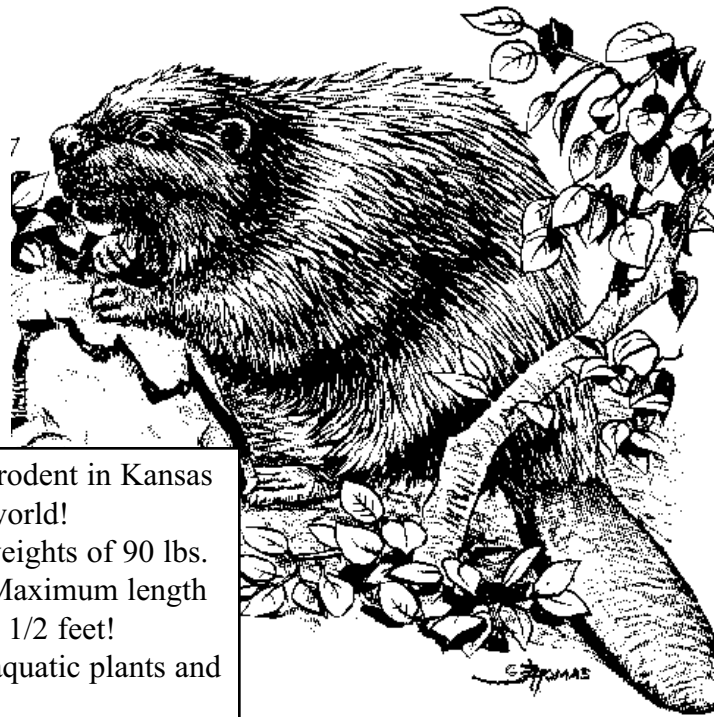
CAN'T FLY AT ALL!



RODENT ROUNDUP

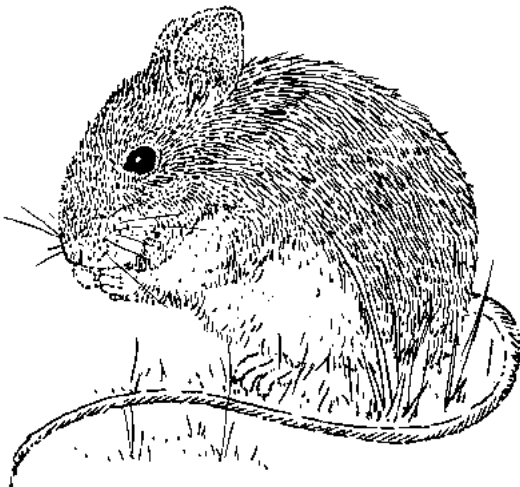
LARGEST RODENT

The **American Beaver** is the largest rodent in Kansas and the second largest rodent in the world! Surprisingly, this rodent may reach weights of 90 lbs. although 30-60 lbs. is more typical. Maximum length for the beaver is about 54 inches or 4 1/2 feet! Beavers feed on roots and shoots of aquatic plants and the leaves and twigs of trees.

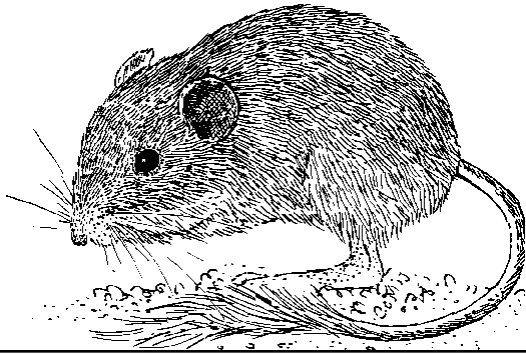


MOST LITTERS

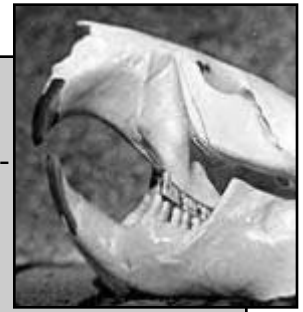
The **Deer Mouse** produces the most litters each year of any Kansas mammal. Females can produce up to 10 litters per year with 4-5 young per litter. They can breed in every month of the year, with peaks from January through April and from June through November. One captive female produced 11 litters with 42 young in one year! As expected from this prolific lifestyle, the deer mouse is the most widespread rodent in North America.



NEVER NEEDS A DRINK!



The **Ord's Kangaroo Rat** is capable of surviving for months without drinking water! They produce the water they need physiologically from the dry seeds they eat! So adverse and unaccustomed to water, these rodents have never learned to swim



Rodents are easily identified by their single pair of long, chisel-like incisors, or gnawing teeth, in the front of both upper and lower jaws. This is the largest order of mammals both in the number of different species and the number of individuals. Some families included in this order are the squirrels, gophers, beavers, porcupines, and, of course, different mice and rat families.

MOUSE WOLVES!



About 90% of the **Northern Grasshopper Mouse** diet is animal material such as grasshoppers as the name implies! This makes them the most carnivorous of all mice species. Because these mice have strong social bonds, are predators, and produce loud, high-pitched howls, they have been called the wolves of the mouse world. They also mark territories and defend their areas against intruders.

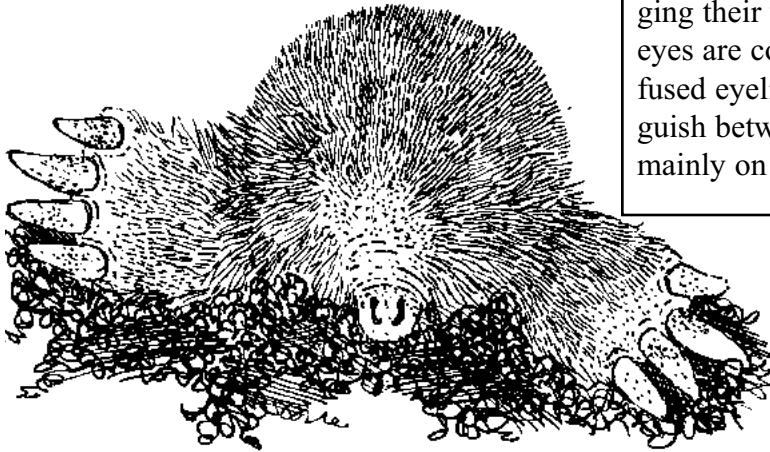


Recent research indicates that **Prairie Dogs** possess a high degree of sophistication when communicating. They can distinguish between people wearing different colored clothing and between people exhibiting threatening or non-threatening types of behavior. In addition, prairie dogs use sounds in different orders and at varying speeds, suggesting a grammatical component to their communication. These findings have led Con Slobodchikoff, a researcher studying prairie dog communication, to assert that they "have one of the most advanced forms of natural language known to science."



UNDERGROUND MAMMALS

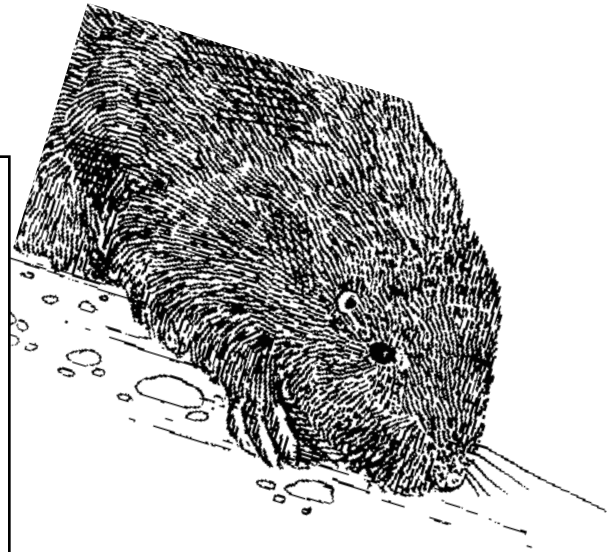
ALWAYS IN THE DARK



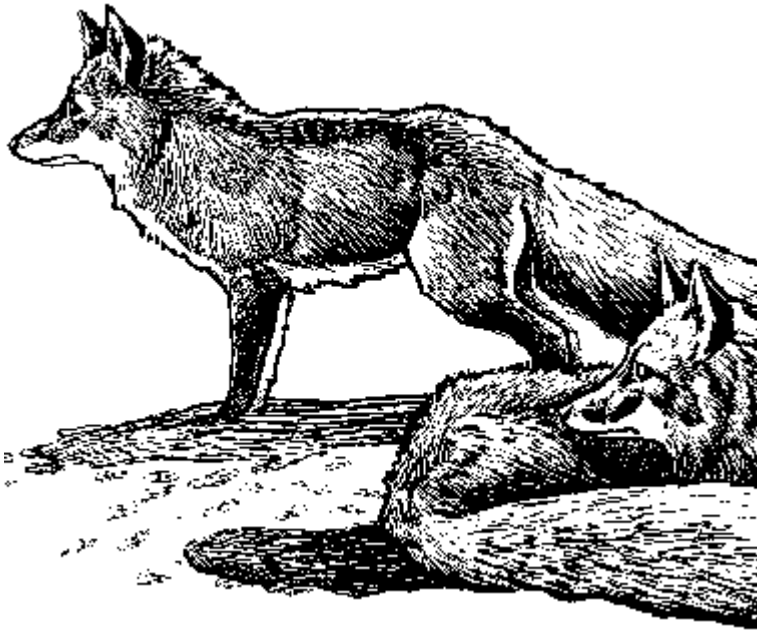
The **Eastern Mole** spends almost 100% of its time underground. Their front feet, legs, and shoulders are greatly enlarged for digging their underground tunnel system. Tiny eyes are concealed in the fur and covered by fused eyelids so the mole can only distinguish between light and dark. Moles feed mainly on earthworms and white grubs.

NOT A MOLE

Not to be confused with the Eastern Mole is the **Plains Pocket Gopher**. It also leads a life in subterranean tunnels, however, this rodent leaves its underground tunnels at night to forage around tunnel entrances and to breed. Strong claws on the front legs are used for digging and, as the name implies, these creatures have pocket-like cheek pouches for holding food. Pocket gophers are almost entirely vegetarians.



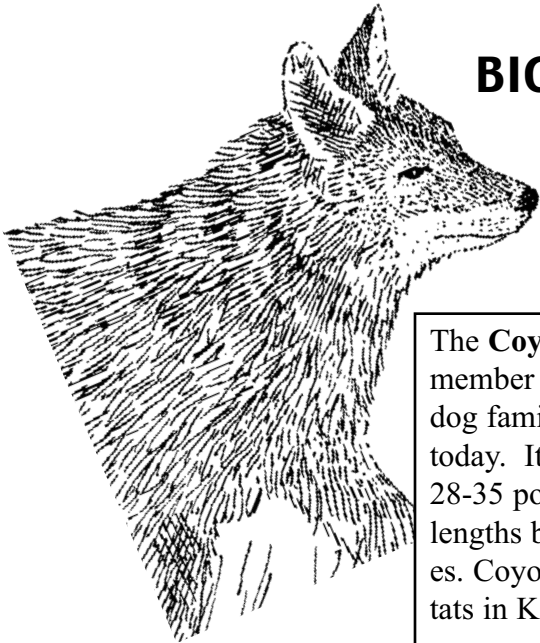
AROUND THE WORLD



The **Red Fox** has the widest distribution of any carnivore in the world. Found in North America, Europe, Asia, and North Africa, this medium-sized animal is very doglike in appearance with a bright, rusty-red coat and a bushy, red tail. These foxes are most commonly found in woodlots and shrublands throughout Kansas. The bulk of their diet is animal matter, consisting largely of rabbits and mice.

WILD DOGS (CANIDS)

BIGGEST



The **Coyote** is the largest member of the canids, or dog family, in Kansas today. It weighs between 28-35 pounds and reaches lengths between 46-52 inches. Coyotes occupy all habitats in Kansas.

The **Gray Wolf** was once the largest member of this family in Kansas, however, it has been gone for nearly a century. The last gray wolf in Kansas was reported in 1905.

SMALLEST



The **Swift Fox** is the smallest member of the canids, or dog family, in North America. It weighs just over 5 pounds (5.1-5.3 lbs.) which makes the average American housecat bigger by comparison! Swift foxes are found in shortgrass prairies in the western third of Kansas.



OLYMPIC FEATS

FASTEST

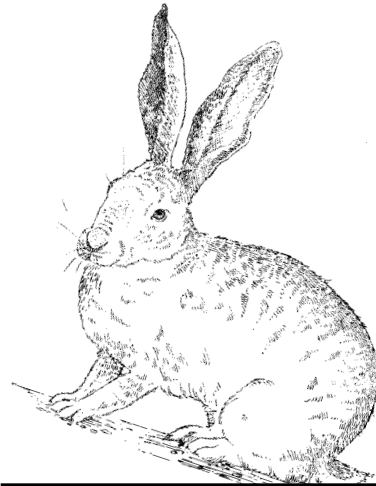


In a race over a distance of a quarter of a mile, no other land animal on earth would win against the **Pronghorn Antelope!** Able to reach speeds of 60 mph. and sustain it for 3-4 minutes, even the mighty African cheetah could not win against this speedster. A cheetah can only sustain its 70 mph. sprint over short distances. Pronghorns can run long distances at speeds of 30-40 mph! They are found in the western one-fourth of Kansas.

LONG JUMP



The **Mule Deer** would win the gold medal for the long jump in our mammal olympics. Mule deer can bound over rocks and brush much faster than the average animal can run around such obstructions. A mule deer can leap 23 feet, 3 inches on a flat jump and 28 feet, 7 inches on a downhill bound.



The **Black-tailed Jackrabbit** would win the silver medal for the long jump. At top speeds, this animal can leap 20 feet. When running, this animal jumps exceptionally high (up to 6 feet) every few leaps to get a look around.



BIGGEST

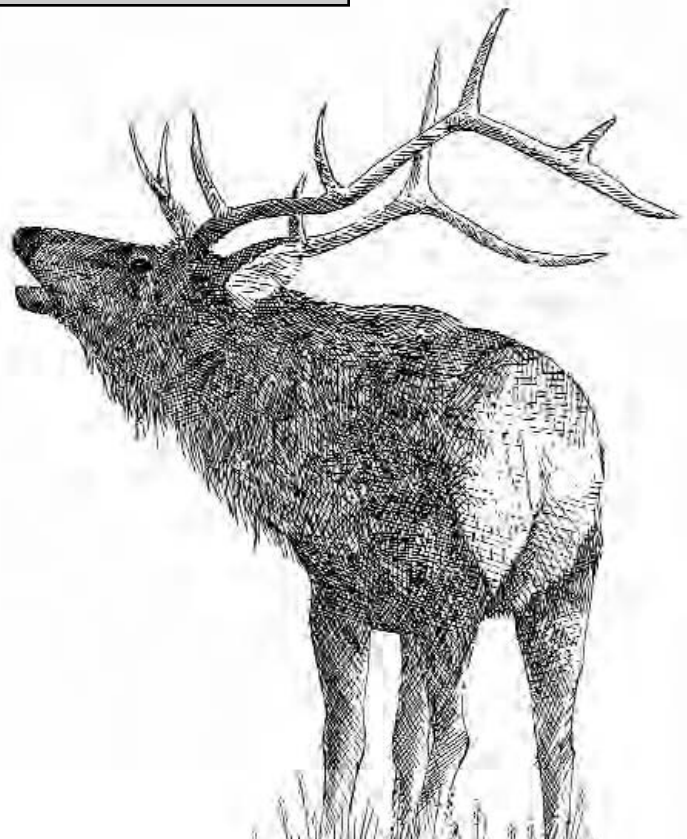


Not surprising, the **American Bison** is the heaviest land mammal found in Kansas and North America. It is actually the third largest type of wild cattle in the world coming in behind the Asian guar and the water buffalo. Weights for American bison are anywhere between 900 to 2,200 pounds but one of the largest on record weighed in at 2,500 pounds (1,140 kg.).

BIG AND BURLY

TALLEST

The tallest animal in Kansas is the **Elk** also called the **Wapiti** by the Shawnee. They are the largest member of the deer family in Kansas and the second largest deer in North America, falling in behind the moose. Males (bulls) are about 25% larger than females (cows). An adult bull may stand 5 ft. high at the shoulders and the antlers can be an additional 4 ft. long.



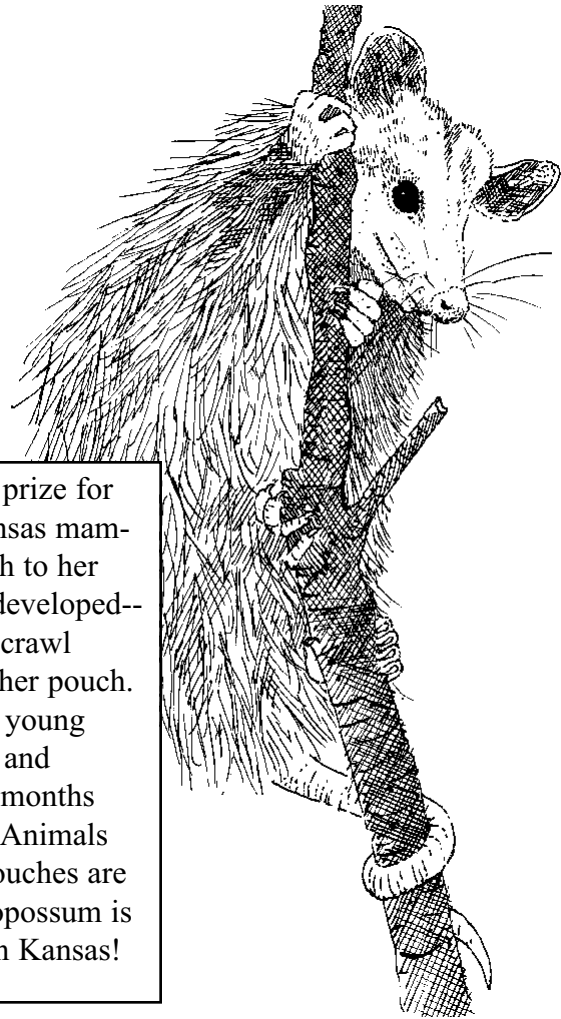
OFFSPRING ODDITIES

PREEMIES

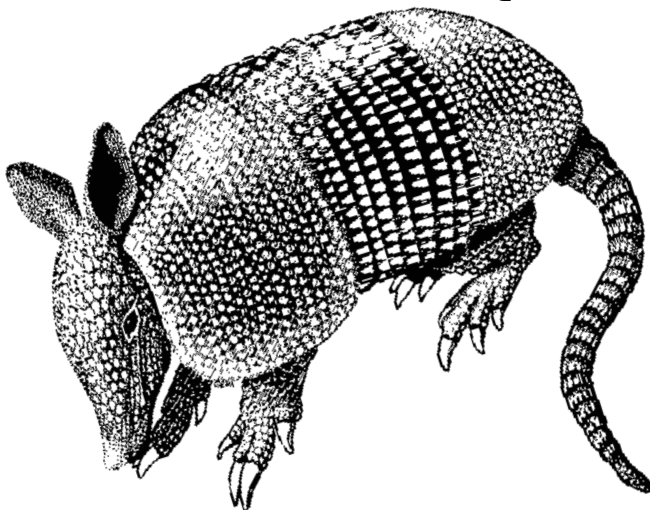
The **Virginia Opossum** would win the prize for the shortest gestation period of any Kansas mammal--only 14 days until mom gives birth to her young. The young are born very underdeveloped--about the size of jelly beans--and must crawl along the mother's fur until they reach her pouch.



Once inside the pouch, the young attach to one of 13 nipples and remain there for two more months until they have developed. Animals that carry their young in pouches are called marsupials and the opossum is the only marsupial found in Kansas!



QUADRUPLETS



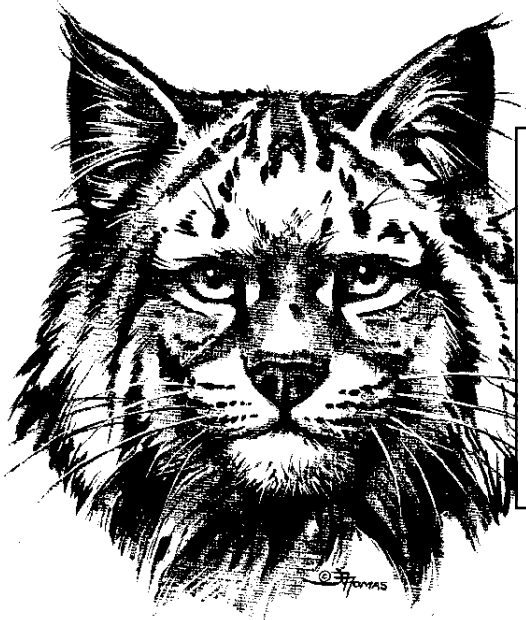
The **Nine-banded Armadillo** always bears an identical set of quadruplets, conceived from a single fertilized egg! The initial embryo divides in two and those two embryos divide into two more. Every armadillo is a clone of its three brothers or its three sisters!

Armadillos are a relative newcomer to Kansas, moving in from the south over the past several decades. It is a distant cousin to the sloth and the anteater. It is also the only animal, aside from humans, that can carry leprosy.



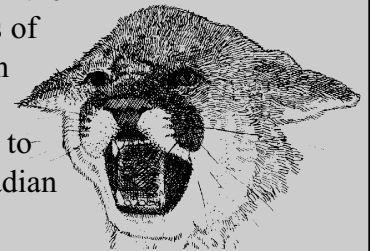
FAMILY BIGGEST

CAT FAMILY



The **Bobcat** is the only native member of the family Felidae found in Kansas today. As such, this makes it the largest. An adult bobcat may weigh from 8 to 22 lbs. and reach a total length of 40 inches.

The occurrence of mountain lions in Kansas is currently under scrutiny. The mountain lion was formerly the largest member of the cat family to be found in Kansas. A full-grown male could weigh as much as 150 lbs. The mountain lion occurs only in the western hemisphere and has one of the most extensive ranges of any land mammal, from the Straights of Magellan in South America to the Canadian Yukon.

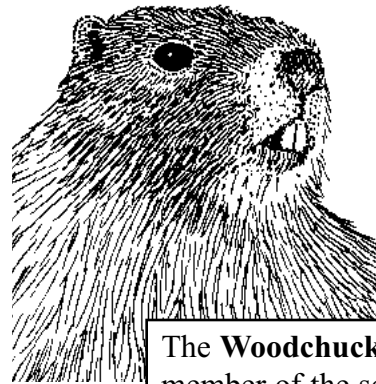


MINK FAMILY



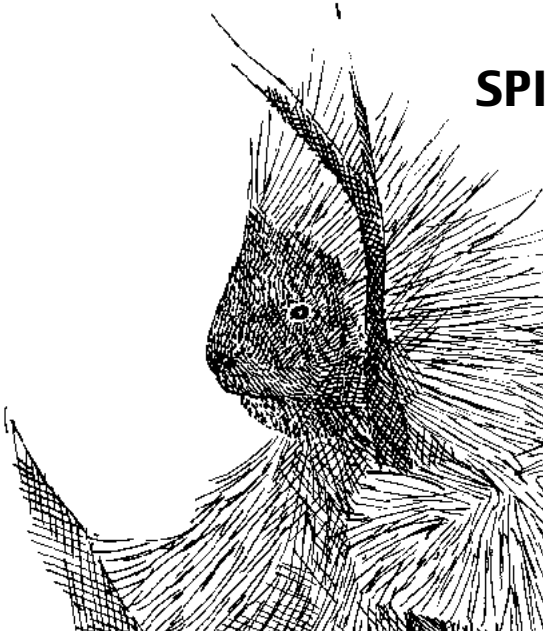
The **Badger** is the largest member of the mink family and pound for pound, it is probably the most powerful mammal in Kansas. An adult badger may weigh 10-16 pounds and reach a total length of 32 inches.

SQUIRREL FAMILY



The **Woodchuck** is the largest member of the squirrel family. It is also sometimes called a groundhog. This squirrel may reach a weight of 12 pounds and be 26 inches long!





SPIKEY DEFENSE

The **North American Porcupine** is a heavy - bodied rodent that moves slowly as it forages at night. Hidden within the fur of the back, rump, and tail are as many as 30,000 sharp quills. When threatened, porcupines will arch their back, erect their quills, and slap the aggressor with their tails. Porcupines **DO NOT** throw their quills. It is the second largest rodent in Kansas.

NOT THE AVERAGE DEFENSE

SMELLY DEFENSE

The **Striped Skunk** is best known for its ability to spray musk when it feels threatened. This musk is stored in a pair of glands located under the tail and it is expelled either as a fine mist or as a spray of droplets. It is under voluntary control and striped skunks are reported to be accurate up to 12 feet. The musk glands contain enough musk for 5-6 sprays, and the glands will refill within one week. Exposure to the musk may cause eye irritation, nausea, and swelling of the nose lining.



GRAY MYOTIS

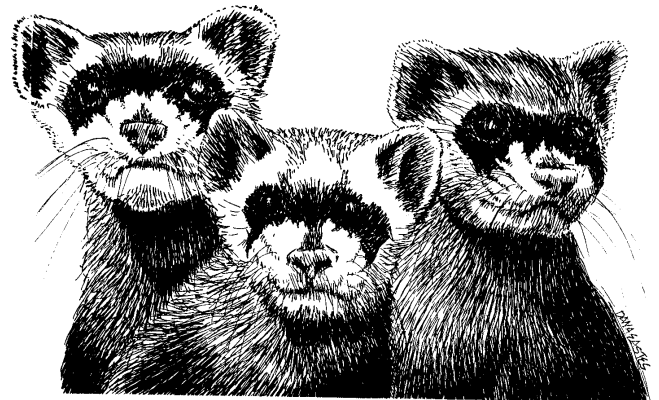


ENDANGERED MAMMALS

The **Gray Myotis** is a dark grayish-brown bat and the only bat listed on the Kansas Endangered Species list. This bat is found in Kansas only in the southeastern part of the state and is known to use the storm sewers in Pittsburg, KS. No where else is this bat recorded using storm sewers. It migrates to limestone caves in Kentucky during the winter.

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET

The **Black-footed Ferret** is the most endangered mammal in North America. The last verified sighting in Kansas occurred in 1957. Almost 95% of this ferret's diet consists of prairie dogs and the decline of the ferret appears to be directly related to control of prairie dogs by humans. Ferret populations are rebounding with captive breeding programs and many ferrets have now been released back into the wild. Consideration for releasing black-footed ferrets on private land in Kansas is on the table in 2007.



QUIZ

1. What is the largest member of the deer family in Kansas?
2. What mammal has an instinct to jump straight up when startled?
3. Pound for pound, what is the most powerful mammal in Kansas?
4. What mammal “plays dead” when threatened?
5. What mammal must consume 60–100% of its body weight daily?
6. What mammal uses echolocation to find its food?
7. What mammal would rather crawl under fences than jump them?
8. What mammal uses its tail as a white flag to signal danger?
9. What mammal hair can lay down equally well either frontways or backwards?
10. What mammal can completely change its environment to suite its needs (create ponds)?
11. What mammal has over 17 distinctive calls to communicate with other members of the species?
12. What mammal has a short “bobbed” tail?
13. What mammal is the smallest member of the dog family?
14. What mammal produces the most litters in a single year?
15. What rodent is likely to never need a drink of water?



ANSWERS

1. Elk
2. Nine-banded Armadillo
3. Badger
4. Virginia Opossum
5. Least Shrew
6. Bats
7. Pronghorn Antelope
8. Whitetail deer
9. Eastern Mole
10. Beaver
11. Prairie Dog
12. Bobcat
13. Swift Fox
14. Deer Mouse
15. Ord's Kangaroo Rat











On TRACKS is published by the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks several times during the school year.

The purpose of On TRACKS is to disseminate information and educational resources pertaining to the natural, historic, and cultural resources of the prairie, emphasizing Kansas ecology. Information is presented from the perspective of current scientific theory.

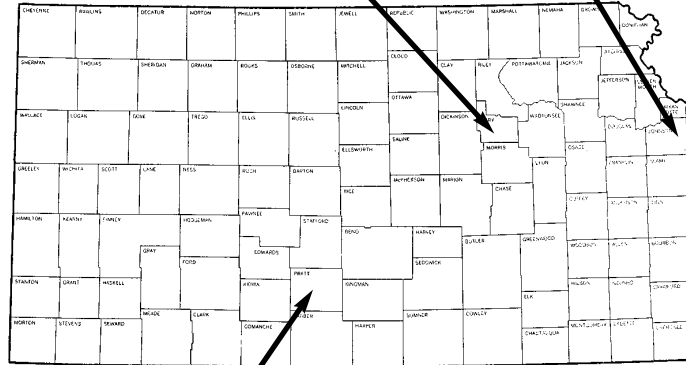
Pat Silovsky
Milford Nature Center
3115 Hatchery Dr.
Junction City, KS
(785) 238-5323
pats@wp.state.ks.us

Alaine Neelly Hudlin
The Prairie Center
26325 W. 135th St.
Olathe, KS 66061
(913) 856-7669
alaine@wp.state.ks.us

Editor:
Pat Silovsky

Contributing Authors:
Roland Stein
Pat Silovsky

Editorial Assistant:
Shelby Stevens



Roland Stein
Pratt Headquarters
512 SE 25th Ave
Pratt, KS 67124
(620) 672-0708
rolands@wp.state.ks.us

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs described herein is available to all individuals, without regards to their race, color, national origin or ancestry, religion, sex, age, sexual preference, mental or physical handicap, or political affiliation. Complaints of discrimination should be sent to: Office of the Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks, 1020 S. Kansas Ave, Suite 200, Topeka, KS 66612-1327.

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 57
Pratt, KS

Wildlife Education Service
512 SE 25th Avenue
Pratt, KS 67124
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

