



Mammals of Virginia

More than **110** species of Mammals call Virginia home. These animals range in size from the tiny insect-eating Pygmy Shrew (weighing less than a dime) all the way up to the largest Black Bear (400lbs.) or Elk (over 700 lbs.). They come in many shapes, and each one has different special traits. Our Mammals also inhabit a variety of different environmental eco-systems (**habitats**). Since we have so many Mammals in Virginia, we are going to focus on the more common ones.

What Makes a Mammal A Mammal?

- Live births
- Young suckle mom's milk (**lactogenic**)
- Warm-blooded (**endothermic**)
- A backbone (**vertebrate**)
- Hair at some point in their life
- 3 inner ear bones
- A large brain
- Teeth variety (**incisors, canines, molars**)



Does Virginia Have Marsupial Mammals?

Most Marsupials live in Australia, but Virginia does have one, the Opossum. The Opossum, like the Kangaroo, has a pouch on her belly with **teats** (nipples) inside for her babies to suckle her milk. Her young are born only partially developed.

They will complete development inside her pouch. She will carry her growing babies to keep them safe and warm. Because she only has 13 teats, if any additional young are born (she may have as many as 35), they will not succeed. Once her babies are too big for her pouch, she will carry them on her back. Opossums have 50 teeth, a prehensile tail (like another hand, immunity to venomous snake bites, and will "**play dead**" or "**play 'Possum**" when frightened.



How Many Babies Can You Count?

Photo:
Missouri Department of Conservation,
Jim Rathert

RACCOON: Many Raccoons now live a "Suburban" lifestyle in our neighborhoods. They are referred to as "Urban Raccoons". Tests show that they are possibly even more intelligent than their forest cousins, and stay "in town" since all of their needs (food and shelter) are met there. They each usually have about 10 denning sites (tree cavities, sheds) which are spread out within their home range. Raccoons are known for "washing" their food, while in fact they are really soaking their foot pads. This increases their sense of touch in order to better identify food underwater by "feel".

Photo by Cindy Andrews, VMN



This Wildlife Hotel provides winter protection from the wind, rain, cold, and predators.

It's in the park. Can you find it?

Photo by Diane Moxley, VMN

Where Do Mammals Live?

There are many different eco-systems (**habitats**) in Virginia, and we have Mammals in all of them. Although many of these Mammals may live part-time in more than one habitat, they are still considered as mainly being from only one. These environments include:

- On land (**Terrestrial**): Elk, Coyote, Fisher, Bobcat, Porcupine, Chipmunk, Weasel, Wild Boar
- In water (**Aquatic**): Beaver, Otter, Muskrat, Nutria, American Mink
- In trees (**Arboreal**): Bat (17 species), Flying Squirrel, Gray Squirrel, Fox Squirrel
- In the ocean (**Marine**): Humpback Whale, Bottlenose Dolphin, Harbor Seal, Florida Manatee
- Underground (**Fossorial**): Mole, Vole, Groundhog



GROUNDHOG: Even though these animals go by many different names depending on in which part of the country they are found, they are all one and the same. They are also called Woodchucks, Marmots, and Whistle Pigs. Since they are known for digging underground burrows and eating mainly fruits and vegetables, many farmers dislike having them in their fields.

Photo by Cindy Andrews, VMN

RED FOX: Nocturnal natives of North America, they were once believed to have been introduced from Europe. During winter they do not hibernate, and use their large, bushy tail like a blanket for warmth. They can easily leap over 6' tall fences in neighborhoods, and like the Raccoon often call our neighbors "home". Although the Red Fox cannot climb trees, the Gray Fox **can** climb trees. Gray Foxes are known to rob birds' nests of eggs, and den both on the ground and in tree cavities.

Red Fox spotted drinking water after jumping a 6' fence in a suburban backyard. Night photo by Diane Moxley





SOUTHERN FLYING SQUIRREL: As our only nocturnal Squirrel, he is smaller (8-10") than his cousins, the Eastern Gray Squirrel and the Delmarva Fox Squirrel. He is special for two reasons: very large eyes which give him incredible night vision, and a fold of skin that allows him to "fly", or glide, from tree to tree. This skin is a membrane that attaches from his front legs to his back legs to form a "wing" on either side of his body. He can glide like a kite through the night air, and rarely comes to the ground.

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DEER MOUSE: Mainly nocturnal, these small gray/ brown Mice with black, bulging eyes are opportunists in the outdoor world. They seek out covered places to hide from predators and rear their young (tree cavities, brush piles, unused bird feeders). They are very good climbers, so most places are accessible to them. Able to get pregnant shortly after giving birth, they are also prolific breeders, like the Rabbit. Deer Mice can have up to 10 pups per litter, and breed once a month. They are food for many other species.

Deer Mouse rearing young inside a bird feeder. Photo by Diane Moxley



Did You Know?

STRIPED SKUNK: Skunks will hiss and stomp their feet on the ground as a warning when agitated or threatened. These nocturnal Mammals have two special anal glands under their tail which act like fire hose nozzles. The Skunk has complete control of these glands and incredible aiming accuracy. They can spray their stinky scent up to 10 - 15" in two different directions at the same time! This spray also contains flammable compounds. Be sure to wash off the scent before going near campfires, etc.

Photo by David Clode on Unsplash



WHITE-TAILED DEER: Love or loathe them, the White-Tailed Deer is an icon of Virginia. For some they evoke the warm, friendly concept of "Bambi". For others, such as gardeners, they are the bane of their existence. Deer are known to eat over 400 types of plants. Occasionally, an **albino** (white fur, pink eyes) Deer will be born in the wild. They rarely live to be very old since they are easily spotted. White-Tailed Deer are active browsing mainly at dawn and dusk (**crepuscular**). Chronic Wasting Disease has taken a heavy toll on our Deer population over the last several years.

Photo by Cindy Andrews, VMN



LITTLE BROWN BAT: Bats provide a very valuable service since their favorite food is insects. The average Bat will eat 1,200 insects per hour. They use a form of built-in sonar, called "**echo-location**", to find their prey in the night sky. A fungal disease, White-nose Syndrome, has taken a very heavy toll on Virginia's Bat population. Numbers are way down. We need to do whatever we can to support and protect Bats, like putting up Bat Boxes where they can roost and live.

Photo by David Clode on Unsplash



EASTERN COTTONTAIL: Who doesn't love a bunny? These cute little Mammals, with their fluffy, white tails, are found throughout the state, and in our yards. They are known for their good vision, acute hearing and sense of smell. Like the White-Tailed Deer, they munch on plants, and are **crepuscular** while feeding. Prolific breeders, they can produce as many as 35-40 young in a year. This is beneficial since they are food for many predators.

Photo by Diane Moxley, VMN



BLACK BEAR: Black Bears are found throughout Virginia, but are in greater numbers in the mountains and less populated areas. They can live for over 30 years and can be considered a nuisance. In rural areas during Autumn, they raid bird feeders and outdoor food sources. Bears need lots of calories to fatten up for the coming hibernation. They have to pack on the pounds to get through the long winter's sleep without any food. Bear cubs are born to their mothers during hibernation, and suckle on her milk while she sleeps. Black Bears hibernate in caves, rocky outcroppings, and inside large hollow trees. They are also known to hibernate in crawlspaces under people's porches and decks!

Photo by Pete Null on Unsplash

