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A Guide to Eastern Canadian Mammals

by
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Illustrations by John Crosby



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However, at the end of the brochure a number of excellent references are given for those who wish additional information.

The data on the distribution and abundance of mammals in Eastern Canada are drawn from the published papers and field notes of zoologists who have worked in the region.

Publications dealing with the mammals of the areas under consideration are listed in the bibliography. The writer studied and collected mammals in the Trois Pistoles area and the Gaspé Peninsula in 1951; northern New Brunswick for short periods from 1946 to 1955; Prince Edward Island in 1954; Cape Breton Island in 1953, and Newfoundland in 1949, 1950, and 1951.

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A GUIDE TO EASTERN CANADIAN MAMMALS

INTRODUCTION

Some Aspects of Mammal Life

Before proceeding to the discussion on the mammals of southeastern Canada, it might be well to ask the question: "What is a mammal?" If we were to say that a mammal is any creature that the average person would call an "animal", it would probably be unnecessary to go further. However, the word "animal" is correctly applied not only to mammals, but also to birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, insects, and worms. A simple definition of a mammal might be "an animal that has a body covering of hair at some period during its lifetime". It might also be added that "the young are always nourished by milk and that almost all mammals are born alive". There are many other important features, of course; such as the presence of a diaphragm separating the lungs and heart from the rest of the body cavity, the presence of well-rooted teeth, a fairly constant body temperature, and a well-developed brain.

Mammals differ a great deal in appearance, and certain species might well pass for fish or birds but for the fact that they have all the characteristics of a mammal. Whales and porpoises were long thought to be fish, and bats are included among the birds in early nature writings and even in the Hebrew scriptures! Mammals vary a great deal in size, too, from the largest creature that ever lived, the blue whale, which may weigh over a hundred tons, to the pygmy shrew, which weighs less than a Canadian dime.

As is true of all animals, mammals live in a wide variety of situations, which the biologist calls "habitats". It is a well known fact that red squirrels live only in or near trees, seals in or near the water, and woodchucks in open fields. One would not expect to find a rabbit in the top of a tree, nor a bat swimming in a lake, because we know that every creature has a certain environment in which it lives and from which it will not depart except under the most unusual circumstances.

Anyone who is interested in mammals will want to know where to look for them. This aspect of mammal study is discussed under each species in the body of the report. In most