

MINK

(*Mustela vison*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



“Mink” is a Swedish word meaning “stinking animal”, referring to the musk scent it uses to mark territory and spray at intruders. **Semi-aquatic**, the mink is solitary except during mating and **rearing** season.



Newborns are naked except for short, fine, white hairs. Their eyes open after 25 days, and **weaning** occurs within 5 or 6 weeks. By 8 weeks, the **kits** begin catching their own prey. The family stays together until the end of August when they **disperse**.

Special features: Minks have a long, slender body and long, thick tail; short, stubby legs; a long neck; and a small, sharply pointed face with small ears and eyes. They have glossy dark brown to black fur with a white chin, throat and chest. Minks have a waterproof dense, oily underfur, partly webbed feet and stiff hairs between their hind toes to help in swimming. Males are larger than females, with an overall length of 45.7 to 76.2 cm. The male weighs 0.6 to 1.3 kg, and the female, 0.5 to 1 kg.

Minks can swim 15 metres under water and dive as deep as 4 metres. They swim on the surface at 1.6-2.4 km per hour. Running in low bounds 25-60 cm in length, they can achieve speeds of 12.8 km per hour.

Their eyesight is not sharp, and they rely on their sense of smell to locate prey. They will climb trees to escape danger and often stand on their hind legs to get a better view of their surroundings.

Minks are aggressive and will attack animals larger than themselves. They are very efficient hunters, often killing more than they need and **caching** any extra. In winter, they usually travel and hunt beneath the ice and in tunnels under the snow.

Food: Muskrats, rabbits, mice, fish, frogs, crayfish, turtles, snakes, insects, waterfowl and shorebirds, eggs and some plant matter.

Denning: Vacant muskrat **burrows** and beaver lodges; near water in cavities under trees, rock or brush piles; or, digs its own den in stream banks. Dens are temporary, as the mink moves often.



Mink inhabit areas with plenty of water supply.

NPS Photo

Predators: Bobcats, lynx, coyotes, foxes, wolves, fishers, river otters, other mink, large birds of prey.

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Distribution:

All Provinces and Territories

Maturity:

10 to 12 months

Average life span:

3 to 6 years

Mating:

February/March

Young born:

April and May

Gestation:

51 days

1 litter a year/Average 3-4 kits

Habitat:

Areas with good cover along streams, lakes and marshlands.

Management Issues:

Mink numbers in some areas have declined due to loss of habitat and the effects of pollution on their aquatic food supply. In pristine habitats, its numbers are stable and growing, only controlled by trapping. Minks can have a large impact on a local prey population, including farm rabbits and poultry.

