

WOLVERINE

(*Gulo gulo*)

Weasel Family/Carnivore



NPS Photo



Wolverines are the largest member of the weasel family. They are solitary and reclusive animals that are rarely seen. In Canada, there are two separate populations: the Eastern population of Quebec and Labrador and the Western population, which ranges from Northern Ontario to the west coast. Called the “hyena of the north”, wolverines primarily feed off wolf and bear kills and **carrion**, but they will kill prey as large as caribou. Like other weasels, the wolverine **caches** excess food and uses a strong smelling scent to mark its territory. It has a reputation as a fierce fighter and is remarkably strong.

Young are born with white fur and closed eyes. At birth they weigh an average of 84.0 grams, and are about 121.0 mm long. They are **weaned** at 8 to 10 weeks, begin foraging with the mother at 10 to 12 weeks and leave the mother when they reach adult size at 6 to 8 months.

Special features: Wolverine resembles a small bear with a long bushy tail. An adult is about 1 metre long; the size of a medium-sized dog. Males typically weigh 12 to 18 kg; females 8 to 12 kg. Adults have long, thick, glossy dark brown fur with a yellowish side stripe running from the shoulders to the tail. They may have light patches on the head, neck, chest or legs. The waterproof fur is frost resistant in very cold weather. The wolverine has short legs and its large furry feet act like snowshoes. Its five toes have long, partly retractable claws used for digging and climbing. It has a round head, small eyes and short rounded ears. Powerful muscles in the shoulders, neck and jaw make it easy for wolverines to crush bones and to feed on frozen prey or **carrion**.

Wolverines have good senses of smell and hearing but poor eyesight. They are not fast runners but can travel for long distances, climb trees, and swim. Wolverine will fight larger or more numerous predators over food. They hunt large prey by pouncing on them from tall rocks or trees.



NPS Photo

If the wolverine were the size of a bear, it would be the strongest animal on earth.

Food: Rodents, marmots, ground squirrels, hares, mountain sheep, mountain goats, caribou, **carrion**, various berries and roots.

Denning: Uprooted trees, caves and rocky crevices, or snow tunnels.

Predators: Wolves, bears and other large **carnivores**, young may be killed by adult male wolverines.

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Distribution:

All provinces and territories from
Labrador west

Maturity:

2 years

Average life span:

5 to 10 years

Mating:

June/July

Young born:

February/March

Gestation:

270 days due to **delayed implantation**

Actual **gestation** is 30-40 days

1 litter every 1 to 3 years/

Average 2 to 3 **kits**

Habitat:

Undisturbed wilderness in remote
forests, mountains and **tundra**.

Management Issues:

Habitat disturbance is a major threat
to wolverines so most local wolverine
populations need extra careful
management. Each province and
territory limits the number of animals
that can be captured and the Eastern
wolverine is not allowed to be hunted
or trapped.

