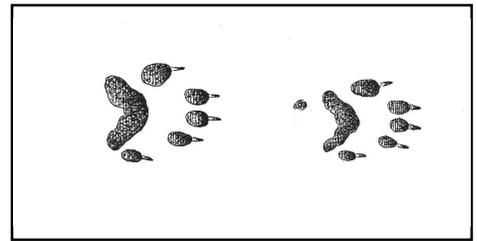
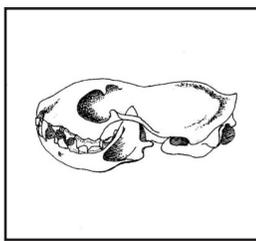
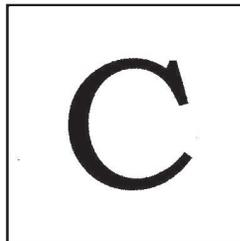
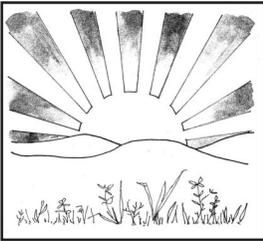
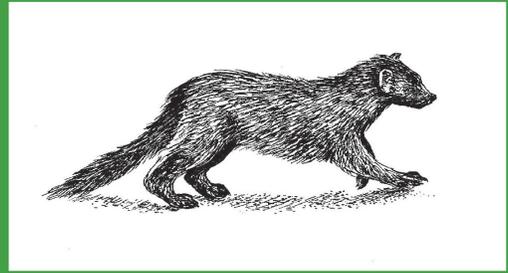


Fisher:

Family Mustelidae
Martes pennanti



A Fisher looks a lot like a mink overall, but larger. They weigh about the same as a red fox, but their legs are much shorter. And males can weigh twice as much as females. Their fur may appear black and shiny from a distance. But up close the fisher has a grizzled dark brown coat with black on the rump and tail. Not that any of these field marks will help you. **Only recently has the fisher has been reintroduced into Pennsylvania.** Finding a fisher would be really hard to do. They are considered rare

Once widely distributed throughout Pennsylvania, fishers were essentially eliminated from the state by the early 1900s as a result of unlimited trapping and timber harvesting. Wildlife management plans to preserve and restore some of the state's forestland had led to a slight increase in fisher populations. The **Pennsylvania Fisher Reintroduction Project,** established in 1994 by the PA Game Commission and the Pennsylvania State University, combined with restoration efforts in neighboring states to help to re-establish their population. They are not yet considered a common sight, but they have made a comeback and will continue to do so if we continue to restore our native mixed forests.

At home in trees, fishers are agile and active predators capable of quickly climbing trees. They are comfortable enough among the treetops to sometimes just hang out in an old owl or hawk nest. They nest in tree cavities high above the forest floor and even hunt squirrels and porcupines among the branches. But most of their hunting takes place on the ground.

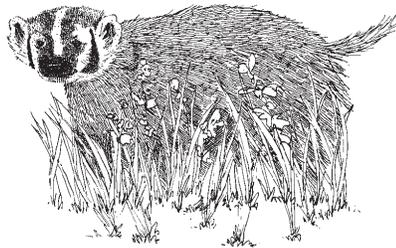
Despite their name, fishers rarely eat fish. They are **carnivores** and like to hunt snowshoe hare or rodents. They will also hunt the treetops for squirrels and porcupines. **Fishers are one of the few predators willing to take on porcupines.** They have learned to flip the porcupine onto its back. Once in that vulnerable position, the fisher bites the porcupine's soft throat and belly while trying to avoid the long sharp quills. Fishers will also eat insects and berries, and during hunting season will feast on leftover offal from a deer kill. As a matter of fact they are great scavengers.

Fishers need large older timber stands of unbroken deciduous or coniferous forest. They would rarely be seen in open areas. As wildlife management plans is the state encourage the return to large tracts of forests, the fisher may be able to recover.

Fishers are active any time of day or night over a habitat range of up to 10 miles. They are **solitary animals**, except during the breeding season or when the female is raising her pups. One litter is produced each year with one to three **kits born in April in a tree cavity**. The young pups stay with their mother until about six months of age - in early fall - when they move on to find their own home territory.

Fishers are having some luck with reintroduction efforts. But other animals related to fishers used to live in Pennsylvania but are no longer found here. The **Marten** (*Martes americana*) is pictured below left, **Badger** (*Taxidea taxus*), below center, and **Wolverine** (*Gulo gulo*), below right.

All three are now considered **extirpated species of uncertain historical occurrence** in Pennsylvania. *Wow, that's mouthful.* What exactly does it mean? In short, they probably once lived in our state. All have been seen on very rare occasions during the past century. There has been discussion to reintroduce the marten, but not the badger or wolverine.



A Simple Review of Fishers

Like the weasels they are related to, **fishers have a long body with short legs**, rounded ears, thick coat and a bushy tail. They have five toes on each foot. Their **small, sharp claws make them excellent climbers**. Which is good because they spend a lot of time in the trees. They even hunt animals like squirrels and porcupines up in the trees. Not too many predators can take on a porcupine, but a fisher will. For their size, fishers are very powerful little animals.

Fishers are secretive and rarely seen in the wild. Here in Pennsylvania they had all but disappeared when we cut down our forests to make room for our towns and cities. Now our state is reintroducing the fisher back into protected wild forests. But fishers are still very hard to find and will only live woodlands with little-to-no human activity.

Young fisher kits are raised in dens in rotting logs or tree cavities (hollow trees). If a predator tries to disturb them the mother will sometimes move her young - several times - if necessary. Male fishers do not help raise their young. Litters are small. Just a few kits each year.

Fishers communicate with each other by scent marking - just like your pet dog. Even though they are not much bigger than a house cat they are pretty fierce predators. Their hearing, sight and sense of smell are all very good. While these carnivores hunt for prey in the tree-tops, they scavenge for other food on the ground. In addition to squirrels and porcupines, fishers will eat any small mammal it can kill. And occasionally they will eat wild fruits and berries too.

In addition to their **natural climbing ability**, fishers can also swim. As adults they have few predators. Their only real threat is from habitat destruction.