



Volume 29/Issue 5

Fisher

January 2016

Fisher

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Fisher



http://oregonfw.fws.gov/InfEd/News_Releases/Fisher/Fisher%20on%20log.jpg

If you have never heard of a fisher, you are probably not alone. Many people in Idaho have not heard of this animal. Fishers are very difficult to find here. You will only find them in thick forests.

Fishers are about the size of a house cat; they look similar to a cat, too. Some people even call them fisher cats, but fishers shouldn't be given this name. Fishers are not in the cat family. They are in the weasel family. They are related to wolverines, badgers and mink.

Fishers are covered by a thick brown to rusty-brown fur coat. They have short legs and long, bushy tails. Males are much bigger than females. Males are about three to four feet long and weigh between eight to 13 pounds. Females are about two to three feet long and weigh only four to six pounds.

You may think by their name that fishers like to eat fish, but they usually do not eat fish. They like to eat small mammals like rabbits, squirrels and muskrats. They will also eat birds, carrion (dead animals) and fruit. One animal fishers are famous for eating is the porcupine. Catching and eating a porcupine is no easy feat. With razor-sharp quills, a porcupine may seriously hurt or even kill an attacking fisher. To catch a porcupine, a fisher will circle around the porcupine and bite its face and head. The fisher keeps doing this

until the porcupine gets tired and the fisher can grab it. The fisher then flips the porcupine on its back. The porcupine's belly doesn't have quills, so this is the safest place to take a bite.

Fishers are terrific climbers. Semi-retractable claws help grip the tree. A long tail helps balance their body, and a special muscle on the shoulder gives them power. They can even climb down a tree head first! Their flexible hind paws can rotate around half of a circle to grasp a tree from almost any direction.

Fishers are animals that like to be alone. The only time adult fishers are together is during breeding time. Fishers have an interesting way to find each other to mate. They use scent and their sense of smell. The hind paws on fishers have a gland that makes a smelly fluid. This gland gets bigger when it is time for fishers to breed. As a fisher walks, it leaves the scent in its tracks. Fishers follow the scent until they find each other.

When it comes time for a fisher to give birth, she looks for a dead tree. The holes in dead standing trees, called snags, are perfect. Baby fishers, called kits, are born in the spring. Kits are blind and helpless when born. At seven weeks, the kits' eyes open; at eight weeks, they begin to climb around and explore their den. They also get their first taste of solid food at about eight weeks. By the time they are five months old, the kits are off on their own.

If you see a fisher in Idaho, consider yourself lucky. Not very many people have had the chance to see a fisher climbing around in Idaho's forests.



Wolverine



The long, thin shape of mustelids makes it difficult to stay warm and store fat, so they eat a lot. As a family, mustelids are mainly carnivores. They eat other animals, but they may also eat fruits, berries or plants. When a mustelid kills more than it can eat at one sitting, it saves the rest for another meal. The leftovers are hidden in a place called a “cache” (cash). When the animal is hungry, it will return to the cache and finish eating its prey.

The Weasel Family

Members of the weasel family are called mustelids (mus-TELL-ids). In Latin, “mustela” means weasel. This group of animals includes wolverine, badger, fisher, weasels, marten, mink, and otters. In Idaho, we have eight species of mustelids.

Mustelids are found on every continent except Antarctica and Australia. They range in size from the sea otter that can weigh as much as a third grader to the least weasel which weighs about as much as two pinkie erasers. Wolverines are the largest mustelid in Idaho; they usually weigh between 20 to 40 pounds. Short-tailed weasels are the smallest. They are eight to 14 inches long and weigh two to seven ounces.

Most mustelids have long, slender bodies and short legs. They can fit easily into tight spaces or move freely through the water. Even the bulky-looking badger and wolverine are amazingly flexible and quick. Several species, including the marten and fisher, are excellent climbers. The otters and mink are wonderful swimmers and spend a lot of time in the water.

All members of the weasel family have something in common. They stink! Mustelids have glands located at the base of the tail that make musk. Musk is a strongly scented liquid. Musk may be used to attract a mate. It is also used to mark their homes or territories. The smell tells other members of the same species to stay out! Some mustelids mark their caches with musk. By doing this, they are warning others to stay away from their food. The smell also helps them locate the cache later.

Keep an eye out for mustelids while enjoying time in Idaho’s wild lands. These active, curious and strong creatures can be very entertaining to watch!



Badger

Protected, Threatened, Endangered, Extirpated ... What Does It All Mean?

Have you ever heard someone say that an animal is threatened or endangered? How about extirpated (EKS-tir-pated) or extinct? You may even hear someone say an animal is protected. What do all these terms mean?

Scientists use these terms to describe how a wildlife species may be doing. In Idaho, the fisher is protected. This means that people are not allowed to hurt or kill them. There are not enough fishers in Idaho to allow a trapping season. Animals may be protected for many reasons. The animal may not have enough young to replace the animals taken by trapping or hunting. Maybe the animal is only found in one area or is losing its habitat.

An animal that is threatened or endangered is protected by a federal law. A species that is threatened is usually becoming much harder to find and may need people to help it. Usually the best way to help an animal is to protect or improve its habitat. The Canada lynx is a threatened species in Idaho. An animal may be listed as endangered if its numbers continue to drop.

If someone says a species is endangered, that means the species is in danger of becoming extinct. These animals are really in trouble. The

species will probably not survive unless people help it. The peregrine falcon was once listed as endangered. In 1970, there were only 40 pairs of peregrine falcons nesting in the United States. People stepped in and started raising falcons and releasing them back into the wild. The program was so successful that the peregrine falcon was taken off the endangered species list and is now only threatened.

Animals that are extirpated are missing from an area where they used to be found, but they are still found living in other areas. Caribou are extirpated from Britain. At one time, caribou lived on the British Islands. Does that mean they are extinct? No, because caribou are still found living in other parts of the world.

Extinct animals are animals that no longer exist. They cannot be found anywhere on the planet. Passenger pigeons, heath hens and dinosaurs are examples of extinct animals.

Now you know what it means if someone says an animal is protected, threatened, endangered, extirpated or extinct.



Passenger
Pigeon

What BIG Feet You Have

Have you ever looked closely at a picture of an animal's foot? With all the wrinkles, bumps and shapes, animals' feet can be pretty interesting.

A close-up picture of an animal's foot can tell you a lot about the animal and where it spends its time. Fishers have very large feet for their size. Their large feet help them to walk on top of the snow in the winter. They also have something else that helps them—hair! The hind paws are hairy. The hairs help fishers to grip on to trees and walk over slick surfaces. Snowshoe hares have a large amount of fur between their toes and on the bottoms of their feet, too. The fur not only keeps the snowshoe hare's feet warm, it also helps the hare walk on top of the snow. This is how the snowshoe hare got its name. Its large, furry feet really do act like snowshoes.

Mountain goats have large squishy pads on the bottoms of their feet. The pads help mountain goats grip onto rocks as they climb on the sides of mountains.

The bottoms of porcupine feet are covered by small little bumps. The bumps make their feet look like they are covered in sandpaper. Their rough feet help porcupines climb trees. The bumps help them grab onto the tree bark as they climb.

Think of a beaver's foot. They have webs between the toes on their back feet. The webs are built-in swim paddles. Many animals that spend a lot of time in the water have webs. Have you ever seen the front feet on a beaver? The front feet do not have webs. The front feet have long toes and claws on them. The front feet are helpful in grabbing onto logs and branches.

Next time you see a picture of an animal's foot, look closely. You may be able to figure out the animal's habitat just by looking at its feet.



Snowshoe Hare

Fisher Tracks

Tracks!

Winter is a great time to look for animal tracks. Tracking can be a lot of fun. It's a bit like playing detective. You observe, gather clues and do your best to put the clues together to solve a mystery. It also can be difficult at times. Here are some tips to consider when figuring out what animal left a track.

Look at the track from all directions. Are there other clues nearby? You may need more than a footprint to guess the animal correctly. Look for clues like chew marks, bones or scat. Scat is animal poop, and it is often one of the best clues you may find to solve your animal mystery.

Notice the size of the track and its shape. Mammal tracks are usually made up of marks left by the claws, toes, palms, heels and the space in between the toes and pads. Not every track will show all of these things, of course. It all depends upon the animal, and what the animal was doing at the time the track was left. This is what a spotted skunk track might look like:




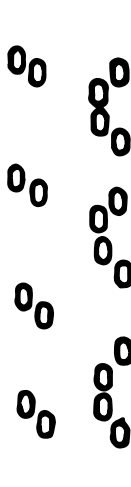


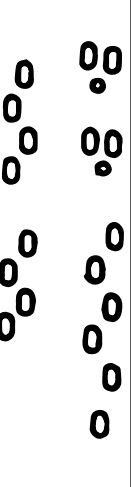


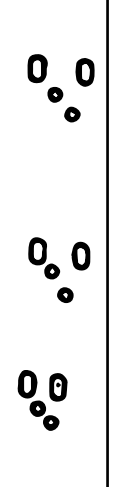


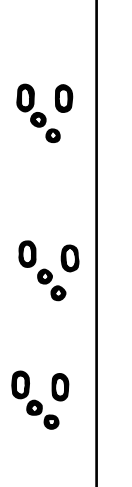


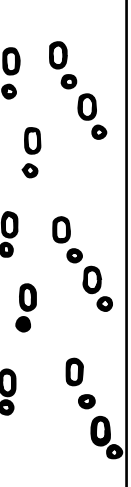


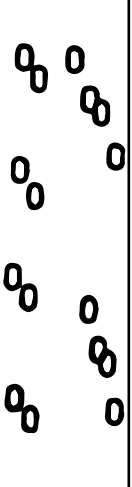





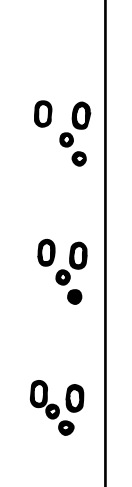

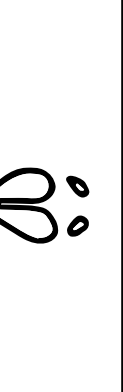
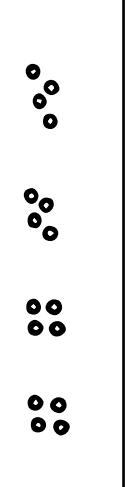

How many toe marks show in the track? Fishers have five toes on both the front and back feet. Weasels also have five toes, but sometimes only four toes leave marks. Hares have four toes only on their back feet; the front feet have five toes. In tracking guides, toes are numbered one to five beginning with the inside toe and moving outward. The smallest toe (#1) is usually found on the inside of most mammals' feet. This can help you tell if a track is from the left or right foot of an animal.

The front legs of dogs actually have five toes! The first toe is found high up on the leg, so you don't usually see it in a track. Coyote tracks usually have four clear marks left by the toes, and the front foot tracks are always larger than the rear foot tracks.

These are just some of the things to consider when looking at tracks. The mammal track comparison chart in this issue will help you tell some tracks apart. At least you may be able to tell if the animal is from a certain group. Good Luck!



Mammal Family Track Key

Toes		Claws	General Shape & Outline	Common Gaits	Shape of Pads	Family
4	Yes				Dog	
4	No				Cat	
4 or 5	Rare				Rabbit	
4 or 5	Varies				Rodent	
5th toe may not show	Sometimes				Bear	
5th toe may not show	Sometimes				Weasel	
5	Sometimes				Raccoon	
5 (are tiny)	No				Shrew	
2	Dew Claws				Deer	

Resolve to ... Be Outside

Happy New Year! This is the time of year when people are making New Year's resolutions. They think of something they would like to try or change during the coming year. Often people resolve to become healthier by exercising or losing weight. This year how about resolving to be outside!

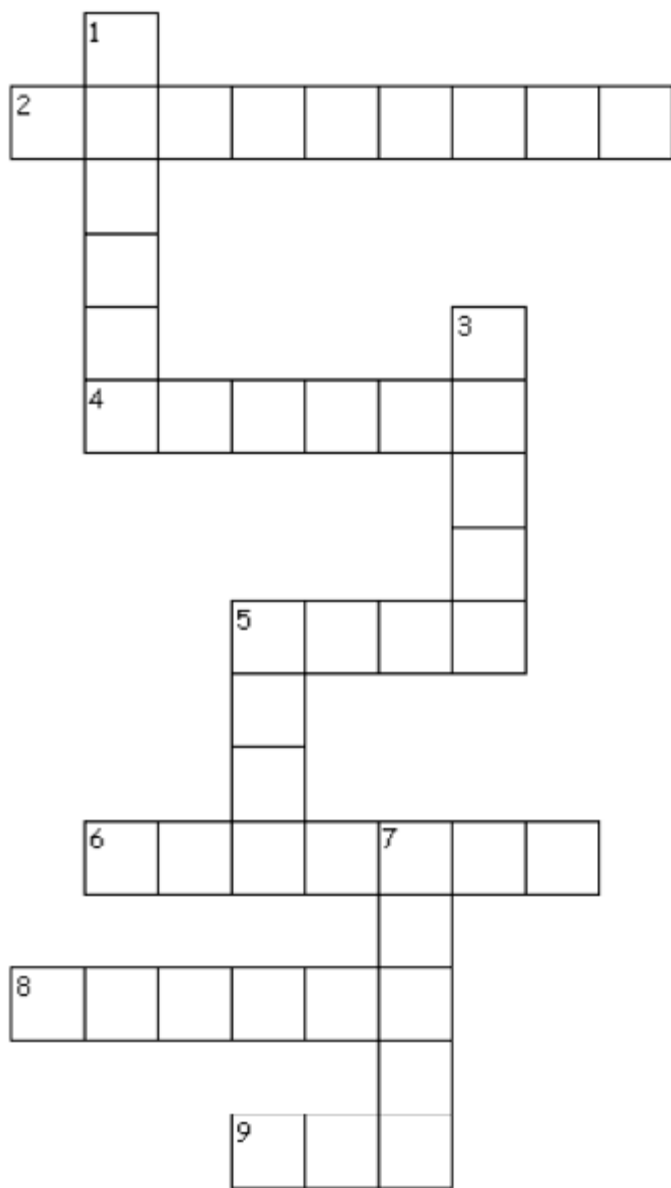
If you are more familiar with the sounds of Mario Brothers than you are the birds in your town, this may be a great resolution for you. Being outside will be a refresher for your body and mind. Spending time outside can be great exercise. Skiing, sledding, hiking, bird watching, and digging in the snow will all give your body a nice winter workout. Even walking around the block will get the blood flowing.

If you are feeling fidgety or anxious, go outside. Bundle up and embrace the beauty of nature. Find a nice quiet spot, close your eyes and let the sounds of nature soothe your soul. Watch a scampering squirrel or busy bird as it looks for food. You may be surprised how a few quiet moments outside can calm the mind. That math problem you have been trying to solve or paragraph you have been trying to write might just become clearer.

Being outside does have great benefits for the body and mind. Even better than that, it is fun! Resolve this year to spend more time outside. If you do, you may find 2016 a fitter and calmer year!



Fisher Criss-Cross



Across

2. This is an animal the fisher is brave enough to attack.
4. Fishers are members of the _____ family.
5. Fishers can climb down a tree _____ first.
6. Fishers live in thick _____.
8. The hind feet of a fisher _____ to help them climb around in trees.
9. The name for a baby fisher.

Down

1. Baby fishers are born in a _____ tree.
3. Fishers are _____ and helpless when born.
5. This helps fishers grip while climbing and walking.
7. Fishers use this to find each other during breeding season.

Words

- | | |
|---------|-----------|
| Blind | Porcupine |
| Forests | Rotate |
| Hair | Scent |
| Head | Weasel |
| Hollow | |
| Kit | |

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express,
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