

## T11.9 CARNIVORES

The mammals of this group are primarily flesh-eaters, but some, like the bear and raccoon, are omnivorous. Twelve species of carnivore are now present in Nova Scotia.

### DOG FAMILY

The Red Fox and the recently arrived coyote are the only members of this family in Nova Scotia. The earlier presence of the wolf was probably marginal, perhaps only amounting to the occasional incursion from New Brunswick. Arctic Foxes frequent southward-drifting ice floes off the Labrador coast, and in 1923, 1935 and 1991 there were records of Arctic Foxes reaching Cape Breton Island. Red Foxes prefer semi-open country and are seldom found in dense forest. They are often associated with agricultural land.

### CAT FAMILY

Two members of this family, the bobcat and lynx, are definitely found in Nova Scotia, while circumstantial evidence indicates the presence of a third member, the cougar. The bobcat, a more southerly animal than the lynx, is widely distributed throughout the province, while the lynx is now largely restricted to the Cape Breton Highlands (Region 200).

Snowshoe Hare is an important part of the diet of both species, although the bobcat is somewhat less dependent on it. In other parts of the country a relationship between the population cycles of the hare and the lynx has been observed, but this has not been well documented in Nova Scotia. The lynx prefers dense climax boreal forest with a dense undercover of thickets and windfalls, while the bobcat will frequent a much wider range of habitats, including swamps, second-growth forest, and even agricultural land.

The cougar is a much larger animal than either of the other cats and requires large areas of unpopulated forest land. It is estimated that the home range of cougar is



**Plate T11.9.1:** The Common Weasel or ermine is widespread throughout Nova Scotia. It preys mostly on small mammals, such as mice, and the eggs of ground-nesting birds, and occasionally on young hares. The ermine turns white in the winter, except for the tip of its tail, which is black. Photo: M. Elderkin

often in excess of 90 km<sup>2</sup>. Sightings, fresh tracks and cougar screams have been reported, but no cougar has yet been photographed, trapped or shot.

#### BEAR AND RACCOON

Although a member of the carnivore order, the Black Bear's diet is three-fourths vegetable matter. It is widely scattered throughout the province but more numerous in the five western counties.

Bears range widely over a variety of habitats and often move on to barrens in the summer to forage for berries. There appears to be a concentrated Black Bear population in the brush barrens east of Yarmouth and west of the Tobeatic and Kejimikujik National Park (Districts 410, 440). The Plateau-Taiga (Region 100) also supports a population during the fall, when blueberries are abundant. It is not known how extensively these bears travel seasonally or during a poor berry year.

The raccoon is a member of the family Procyonidae. It is a widely distributed New World animal and a relatively recent arrival in Nova Scotia. Raccoons are usually found in forested lowland areas near water courses, wooded coastline and salt marsh. They are also often associated with urban and agricultural land, especially in the Annapolis Valley (District 610). They have only recently become established on Cape Breton Island, after being introduced illegally from one of the eastern United States.

#### WEASEL FAMILY

Six species of mustelids (weasels and their allies) occur in Nova Scotia. The mink and otter are semi-aquatic mammals found in streams, lakes, marshes and along the coast, while the ermine (Short-tailed Weasel) uses a wide variety of wooded habitats. All three are common in Nova Scotia (see Plate T11.9.1).

The Pine Marten requires mature coniferous forest; the Fisher will tolerate a wider habitat mix, but needs large cavities in trees for denning. Both have faced drastic decline in numbers due to habitat destruction by cutting and fire. The remnant marten population (exclusive of the Kejimikujik re-introduction) is restricted to the Cape Breton highlands. The Fisher probably disappeared from Nova Scotia early in this century but was reintroduced and appears to have adapted somewhat better than the marten to second-growth forests.

The Striped Skunk is a southerly animal which is believed to have spread into Nova Scotia since 1850. Its numbers declined after 1930, possibly due to disease introduced by skunk farming, until the skunk was

almost extinct. Since then skunks have re-established themselves and are now found throughout the mainland. The highest densities are found in farming areas.



#### **Associated Topics**

T11.8 Land Mammals, T11.11 Small Mammals, T12.11 Animals and Resources

#### **Associated Habitats**

H3 Freshwater, H5.1 Barren, H5.2 Oldfield, H5.4 Talus Slope, H5.5 Cave, H6.1–H6.3 Terrestrial Forested

#### **Additional Reading**

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