



Canoe Country Wildlife BWCA AND QUETICO PARK

Over 52 species of mammals and 150 species of birds inhabit the Boundary Waters (BWCA) and Quetico Park. While on your canoe trip you may see a tiny shrew weighing a fraction of an ounce, or a huge bull moose weighing in at over 1200 pounds.



Traveling and portaging through the BWCA or Quetico Park as silently as possible will afford you with the best possibility of seeing wildlife up close. If you hear a rustling or crashing in the woods, sit quietly and be patient. Moose, deer and other mammals frequently lack good eyesight, but have a great sense of smell. Usually they will smell your presence and if you remain still they will move into the open, or right by you after realizing that your smell is not a "threat" to them. Going out on an early morning or late evening paddle will offer additional opportunities to view wildlife as they move to the water's edge to feed and drink.

Following are just some of the wildlife you may encounter on your canoe trip.

MAMMALS

MOLES AND SHREWS - This small flesh eating mammal spends much of its time underground, under rocks, under logs and sometimes even underwater. This tiny creature is covered with dense fur, has very small eyes and teeth and a long slender nose. Moles and shrews feed mainly on insects and earthworms. The pygmy shrew is the smallest living mammal, 3 inches long including the tail. Look for this animal along the shoreline, scurrying under rocks and logs.

BATS - Yes, we do have bats in the north woods but since they feed on insects (black flies & mosquitoes) they are a welcome member of the forest family. Six species are found in our area. Bats are nocturnal, navigating by emitting a high-pitched sound inaudible to humans. Their large ears detect the echoes made when these sounds bounce off of nearby objects. During the winter months, the bats will hibernate or migrate to a warmer climate. As dusk settles in, look into open areas above fields or your campsite and you're sure to see the erratic flight of several bats searching for their evening dinner of insects.

HARES AND RABBITS - The snowshoe hare is the most commonly seen member of this family in our wilderness area. Brown in the summer, his coat changes to white by mid-November. Extra large back feet allow the hare to bound and leap over deep snow. A population cycle which peaks every 7 - 11 years determines the ease in which you'll find the hare. This group is an important natural food source for the many carnivorous mammals and birds of prey. The cottontail is seldom seen this far north. Watch the grassy areas near camp and swampy parts of the portages for hares.

MOOSE AND DEER - This vegetarian group is a common sight in the canoe country. The moose is a majestic sight to be had, bulls weighing in excess of 1500 pounds. The white-tailed deer is best known for its large white tail which is raised in alarm like a flag as it runs from danger. At one time, the woodland caribou also roamed this area. Plans are underway to reintroduce the caribou to the area. Shallow bays and rivers holding underwater vegetation are the places to view moose. In early summer, cow moose will keep their young calves near the water. As you paddle, watch the shoreline for deer as they come to the water's edge for a drink.

CANINE FAMILY: COYOTE, FOX AND TIMBER WOLF - Members of this group are carnivores; they have large canine teeth for tearing flesh, although some will also eat berries and fruit. The coyote resembles a large-eared medium size dog. The timber wolf is noticeably larger with longer legs and nose. Both the coyote and wolf are wary of humans and rarely seen. Listen closely in the late evening hours and you may hear the howling of wolves in your area. Watch the portage trails for wolf scat, often containing deer hair. The fox is dainty in comparison with coloration ranging from red to silver in our area. The fox will often investigate your empty fire grate when you leave camp so watch the campsites as you travel, and you may see a fox digging around the ashes checking for food scraps.



WEASEL FAMILY: MARTEN, FISHER, OTTER, MINK AND SKUNK - Martens are a tree-dwelling weasel, about the size of a small house cat. Coloration on the head and chest can be silver to orange and the rest of the coat is usually a brown/black. This fox-like animal is usually seen chasing squirrels in the pines. The fisher is a larger mammal with a darker coat. Since the fisher lives in a very dense cover, chances of spotting one are slim. Mink are an aquatic weasel with glossy dark fur and a white spot on the chin.



Several mink are sometimes seen traveling together, loping along the shoreline, investigating every rock, log and stick along the way. Weasels have a long, slender body with short legs and a white-tipped tail. Brown in the summer, white in the winter, it is referred to as an "ermine" in the fur industry. You'll have to be quick to spot this fast mover! River otters have a sleek, 3 foot long body with a small head and ears. Much of their time is spent chasing fish, frogs, and crayfish. Otter will often investigate you as you fish or paddle through a lake. You may think that they are "snorting" at you when actually they are just trying to get a good smell to figure out what you are. Watch your stringers if you have them tied up at shore, because the otter will steal your fish in a hurry. A few striped skunks wander our area - few would fail to recognize this critter. Don't ignore their raised tail!

BLACK BEAR - The black bear travels the canoe trails as well. Bears range in weight from 50-300 pounds, some reaching 600 on occasion! Colors range from glossy black to cinnamon brown. Keep those food packs in the air and a clean camp!

RACCOON - The raccoon is a rare sight, more common in the central region of Minnesota.

FELINE FAMILY: LYNX & BOBCAT - The cat family includes the solitary and nocturnal lynx and bobcat. These cats are rarely seen, because the area sits at the southern limit of the lynx range and the northern extreme of the bobcat's range.

RODENTS: SQUIRREL, CHIPMUNK, WOODCHUCK, BEAVER, MOUSE AND MUSKRAT - Rodents greatly outnumber other mammal groups in the forest. Since their food is mainly vegetable matter, rodents have long chisel-like incisors. The squirrel family is distinguished from other rodents by its hair-covered tail. With the exception of flying squirrels, they are active during the daylight hours. The very common red squirrel can be heard chattering throughout the area. This rusty colored rodent becomes quite tame at many campsites. The flying squirrel lives in hollow trees and is seldom seen during the daylight hours. Their flight is actually a "glide" made possible by a fold of furry skin stretched between the front and hind legs. The flying squirrel is covered with a velvety gray coat and has large round eyes. Chipmunks are a busy ground scavenger with black and white stripes on their backs to distinguish it from other rodents. Another easily tamed forest friend! The woodchuck is a stocky brown animal adapted to burrowing, usually found on rocky hillsides. Our area's largest rodent is the beaver, reaching 60 pounds. He is covered with a rich brown fur. You can find beaver in most lakes and ponds of the canoe country, their dams and lodges dotting the landscape. Watch the shoreline for "beaver chews" and you may see a beaver working on a tree or stick. If you get too close, he'll swim into the lake and slap his large, flat tail as a warning to other beavers that danger is near. Rats and mice are a large group of rodents. The muskrat is an aquatic rodent that makes a house similar to that of the beaver. The muskrat is about 20 inches long with beautiful brown fur and a silver-tipped belly.



BIRDS

CANOE COUNTRY BIRDWATCHING - Shorebirds, songbirds, birds of prey, ducks... 155 species of birds breed in the Superior National Forest. Birds account for over 79% of the wildlife in the canoe country. Most are overlooked. Many small and inconspicuous songbirds are hidden by thick foliage. Seeing them requires much patience, stalking, and braving the insects of the thick woods.

BALD EAGLE - Everyone wants to see the northern bald eagle and everyone should. Nests are scattered throughout the canoe country. Soaring eagles can be seen often as you gaze into the sky. Watch closely and you may see the eagle dive for fish.

OSPREY - The osprey depends almost entirely on fish for its diet, unlike the eagle which also scavenges for meat. Osprey build a huge nest, almost 6 feet across, usually in a large, dead tree near the shoreline.

COMMON LOON - The common loon will be seen by every canoe traveler at one time or another. Pairs can be found on almost every wilderness lake. Low, loosely formed nests hold one or two eggs. When hatched, you'll see the young loons riding on mom's back. The haunting call of the loons and their spectacular water dancing antics will be one of your lasting memories from our area.

COMMON RAVEN - The common raven is the large bird often seen feeding on roadside kills. This bird will also follow wolf packs where it will scavenge the remains of wolf kills. Nests can be found on cliff ledges or in tall pines.

TURKEY VULTURE - When you see a flock of "circling" black birds, you are seeing turkey vultures, often mistaken for eagles. If you can get a close look, you'll see that the bird's head is actually quite bald. This scavenger will eat just about anything he can find laying around. Both the raven and vulture winter in our area.

GRAY JAY - The friendly gray jay, also known as the Canadian jay or lumberjack, will snatch tidbits of food right off your plate. The birds are quite tame and unafraid of people. Wherever you find spruce, tamarack or cedar, you're sure to find the gray jay. This year-round resident looks like a blue jay except the feather colors are not as brilliant.

SPARROW - Many varieties of sparrows inhabit our forest, the most common being the white-throated sparrow. A distinctive call, one low note followed by four high notes, will help you recognize this bird.

RUFFED GROUSE - Many people report hearing "someone trying to start a motor." This "drumming" noise is our ruffed grouse, beating his wings in rhythm to attract a mate or show off for his competition. This chicken-like bird is not afraid of humans in the wilderness area. You may see them strolling through camp or crossing your portage trail.

OTHER BIRDS - Other common birds you may see are the robin, blue jay, rose-breasted and evening grosbeak, wrens, chickadee, blackbirds, warblers, flickers, sapsuckers, and crows.

WATERFOWL - Ducks common to the area are the mallard, black mallard, wood duck, common merganser, hooded merganser and pied-billed grebe. An interesting characteristic of the common merganser, this fish-eating duck uses a "dump nest". Several hen mergansers will lay their eggs in one nest. Some lucky (or unlucky) hen sits on the entire lot! Sometimes you'll see 20-30 chicks all following one hen. The common merganser hen has a grey body, white chest and a rusty red colored crest on the head. The male is black and white with brilliant orange feet and bill.

