

# Muskrat

## *Ondatra zibethicus*

### Description

The muskrat is a fairly large rodent which has adapted to life in and around water. Muskrats are found in North American wetlands and waterways and are considered to be an important creature in their freshwater environments. These animals have a round, portly body covered with rich waterproof fur made up of a short dense silky under coat and a longer, coarse glossy guard coat. Their semi-webbed feet are used like paddles during swimming. A slender, vertically flattened tail acts a rudder when swimming and is covered with scaly skin to protect it from damage. Muskrats live in freshwater marshes and marshy areas where there are ample food sources (bulrushes, cattails, pondweeds or sedges). Muskrats build homes of partially dried or decayed plant material that look like dead heaps of plants. They need quick access to deep water for escape from predators and food access in the winter. Their construction of open-water canals through reeds and floating vegetation creates habitats for many species of waterfowl and aquatic plants which could not survive otherwise.

### FUN FACTS

- Muskrats can remain underwater for up to 15 minutes by reducing their heartrate and relaxing their muscles.
- Numbers decrease dramatically every 7—10 years experts believe due to cyclical health declines/reproductive failure.
- Muskrats have special teeth the protrude ahead of cheeks/lips permitting them to chew underwater with a closed mouth.
- Canada Jays deal with our cold winters by decreasing their body temperature at night.

If you find an injured or orphaned wild animal in distress, please contact the Calgary Wildlife Rehabilitation Society hotline at **403-214-1312** for tips, instructions and advice, or visit the website for more information [www.calgarywildlife.org](http://www.calgarywildlife.org)



*Photo Credit: Tony LePrieur*

### Contact Us

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