

# North American Porcupine

*Erethizon dorsatum*

## Description

The porcupine, when described, seems an odd looking animal, having: a short blunt nose, small (short sighted) eyes, almost invisible short round ears, orange continuously growing front teeth, humped shoulders, bowed legs, long curved claws for climbing trees, a thick rounded muscular tail, and a soft woolly undercoat with long yellow tipped guard hairs that conceal its quills. It plants its feet fully on the ground when walking (like humans and bears), moving with a slow swaying walk, and a clumsy looking gallop when threatened. The larger male porcupine can weigh up to 18 kgs (40 lbs) and be up to 90 cm (36 in) long (not including its tail of up to 30 cm or 12 in long). Porcupines are known for their quills which are barbed and used as a defense against would-be predators. Porcupines eat bark, pine needles, nuts, wild fruit, leaves, catkins, dandelions, grasses, and other leafy plants. Porcupines are rodents; their teeth continue to grow throughout their lifetime. They chew to manage this, including many human items such as tires, leather and wood.

## FUN FACTS

- Quills are made out of keratin and are modified thick hairs. They are barbed making extraction difficult.
- Porcupines cannot shoot their quills and must make contact in order for them to loosen and lodge in another animal.
- Porcupines have approximately 30,000 quills on that cover their body with the exception of their nose, feet, and belly.
- Baby porcupines are born with quills which are soft. They harden within hours of birth.



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: Tanya Wierenga

## Contact Us

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