



The Raccoon

## THE RACCOON

Sometimes, as dusk settles across North America, you might catch sight of a clever little creature with a black mask around its eyes. It might be scurrying across a backyard, rummaging through a forest, or even perched boldly on a fence. That's the raccoon, or *Procyon lotor*. The name *Procyon* comes from Greek, meaning "before the dog," as raccoons are active during the hours when the world is quiet and dogs are resting. You'll recognise a raccoon not only by its mask but also by its bushy, ringed tail and its hand-like paws that seem to explore and grasp everything it touches.

Raccoons are excellent climbers and swimmers. Their bodies, about 40-70 cm long (excluding their tail), are sturdy, yet agile, and they weigh between 3.5kg to 9kg, about the size of a small dog or a large pumpkin! Their fur is thick and greyish-brown, helping them stay warm in the colder months. In winter, you may not see them as often, because they rest for long periods, though they don't fully hibernate.

What makes raccoons truly fascinating are their front paws. They have five long, nimble fingers that act almost like human hands. These paws allow them to open jars, unlatch doors, and even feel for food under water. If you watch a raccoon near a stream, you might see it washing its food before eating, though scientists aren't sure why they do this.

Raccoons are omnivores, which means they eat just about anything! In the wild, they feast on nuts, berries, insects, frogs, and even fish. In urban areas, they are known for raiding trash bins, earning them the nickname "nature's little bandits." Despite their reputation for mischief, raccoons play an important role in the ecosystem. By eating pests and spreading seeds from the fruits they consume, they help maintain balance in the environment.

Raccoons have predators like coyotes, great horned owls, and bobcats. However, their biggest threat is humans. Roads, traps, and loss of habitat are major challenges they face. That's why scientists study raccoons to better understand how to protect them and their habitats. Did you know raccoons are native to North America but have spread as far as Europe and Japan? People all over the world are fascinated by their intelligence and adaptability.

In some Native American traditions, the raccoon is seen as a symbol of cleverness and resourcefulness. Their masked face has even made them a popular figure in stories and folklore. I wonder, what would a raccoon think of our human inventions? Would they figure out how to use them too?

**Scientific Name:** *Procyon lotor*

**Order:** Carnivora

**Family:** Procyonidae

**Average Size:** 40cm - 70cm (16in - 28in)

**Average Weight:** 3.5kg - 9kg (7.7lbs - 19.8lbs)

**Lifespan:** 2 - 5 years in the wild, up to 20 years in captivity

**Unique Feature:** Five-fingered paws for dexterity



Raccoons have amazing eyes that help them see in the dark . Their black “mask” around their eyes doesn’t just look cool—it helps reduce glare so they can focus better, especially at night. Raccoons are most active after the sun goes down, and their sharp night vision helps them find food, whether it’s a berry on a bush or a frog near a stream . Their eyes glow in the moonlight because of a special layer behind them called the **tapetum lucidum**, which reflects light and makes their vision even stronger. Imagine being able to see so well in the dark—what would you explore?





Watch the raccoon's front paws with 5 fingers. These paws are so sensitive they can feel objects as if they had fingertips! They don't just use their paws for hunting—they're expert problem-solvers too! They can untie knots, turn doorknobs, and even open jars . In the dark, they use their sense of touch to navigate and figure out their surroundings. You might see a raccoon running its paws over an unfamiliar object as if it's "reading" it.



A raccoon's thick, fluffy fur is like a cozy coat that keeps it warm during chilly nights. This fur isn't just soft—it's also water-resistant, helping the raccoon stay dry when it's climbing trees or exploring near streams. Speaking of climbing, raccoons are expert climbers! They can even climb straight down headfirst! High up in the trees, raccoons feel safe and can spot food or danger from far away. Imagine climbing like a raccoon—how high would you go?



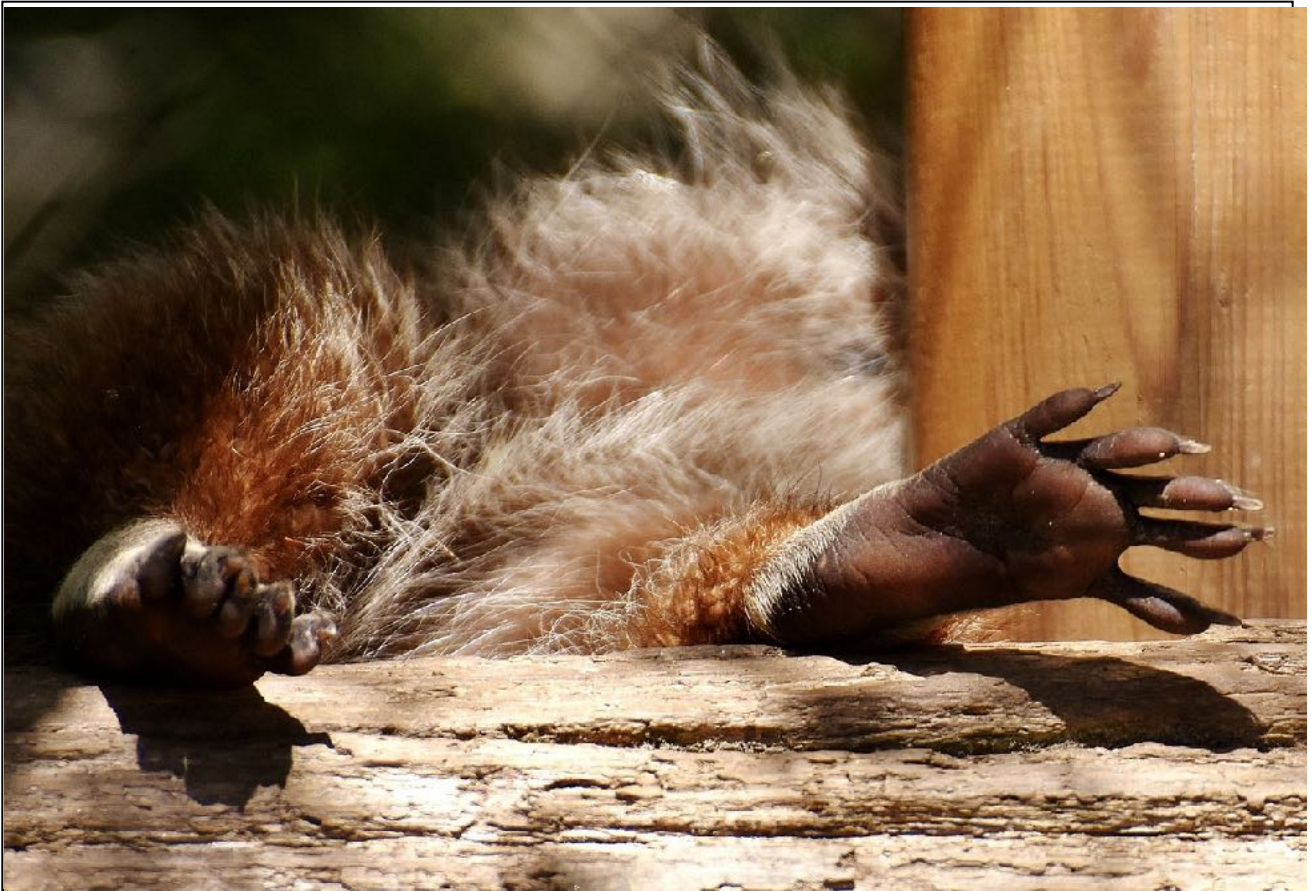


Raccoons are amazing swimmers and love to explore streams, ponds, and shallow rivers . They use their super-sensitive paws to feel for tasty treats like fish , frogs , and even small crabs . Watching them near water is fascinating because they seem so focused, carefully dipping their paws in as if they're searching for hidden treasures. Sometimes, it looks like they're washing their food, but scientists think they might be softening it or just using the water to help them “see” better with their touch. Imagine how exciting it must be for them to discover something squirmy under the surface.?



Raccoons have a varied diet that makes them great at finding food wherever they go. They love to snack on berries, nuts, and juicy fruits they find on trees or bushes. They also munch on insects, frogs, and fish if they're near water. In cities, they might find tasty leftovers like crusts or veggies in trash bins. Their sharp teeth are perfect for all this variety! They use their front teeth to bite into hard nuts or crunchy insects, and their back teeth, called molars, help them chew soft fruits and meat. Raccoons even have strong canine teeth like a dog's, which help them grab onto their food. With all these tools, they're always ready for their next snack!





Look at the raccoon's strong legs. Its sharp, curved nails act like built-in climbing hooks, helping it grip tree bark, fences, and even slippery surfaces. These nails make the raccoon an excellent climber, able to scale walls or trees to escape danger or find food. The nails are also perfect for digging into the soil to uncover tasty insects or nuts buried underground. When walking, the raccoon's nails stay slightly raised, keeping them sharp for when they're needed most. Imagine having tools like that on your hands and feet—how high could you climb?





A raccoon's thick, ringed tail isn't just for looks—it helps with balance! Whether climbing a branch or sneaking along a narrow edge, that tail works like a tightrope walker's pole. How many rings can you count on the tail in the picture?



In the wild, they feast on fruits , nuts , insects , and small animals , but in urban areas, trash bins are like buffets for them. These clever creatures have learned that human garbage often contains leftovers like pizza crusts , bread, or even fresh vegetables . Interestingly, their ability to associate smells with food helps them remember the best trash bins to return to later. So, if a raccoon has visited your backyard once, it might be back again next week!





Raccoons don't fully hibernate like bears , but they do something called **torpor**, where they sleep for long periods during the coldest months . Their thick fur keeps them warm, but to save energy and survive the winter when food is scarce, raccoons reduce their activity. When the temperatures drop and snow falls, they retreat in cozy dens inside hollow trees where they can stay out of the wind and conserve body heat. In urban areas, they might even hide under decks, in attics, or inside chimneys. Raccoons often share their dens with other raccoons during the winter months, forming small groups for extra warmth—this is called **communal denning**.

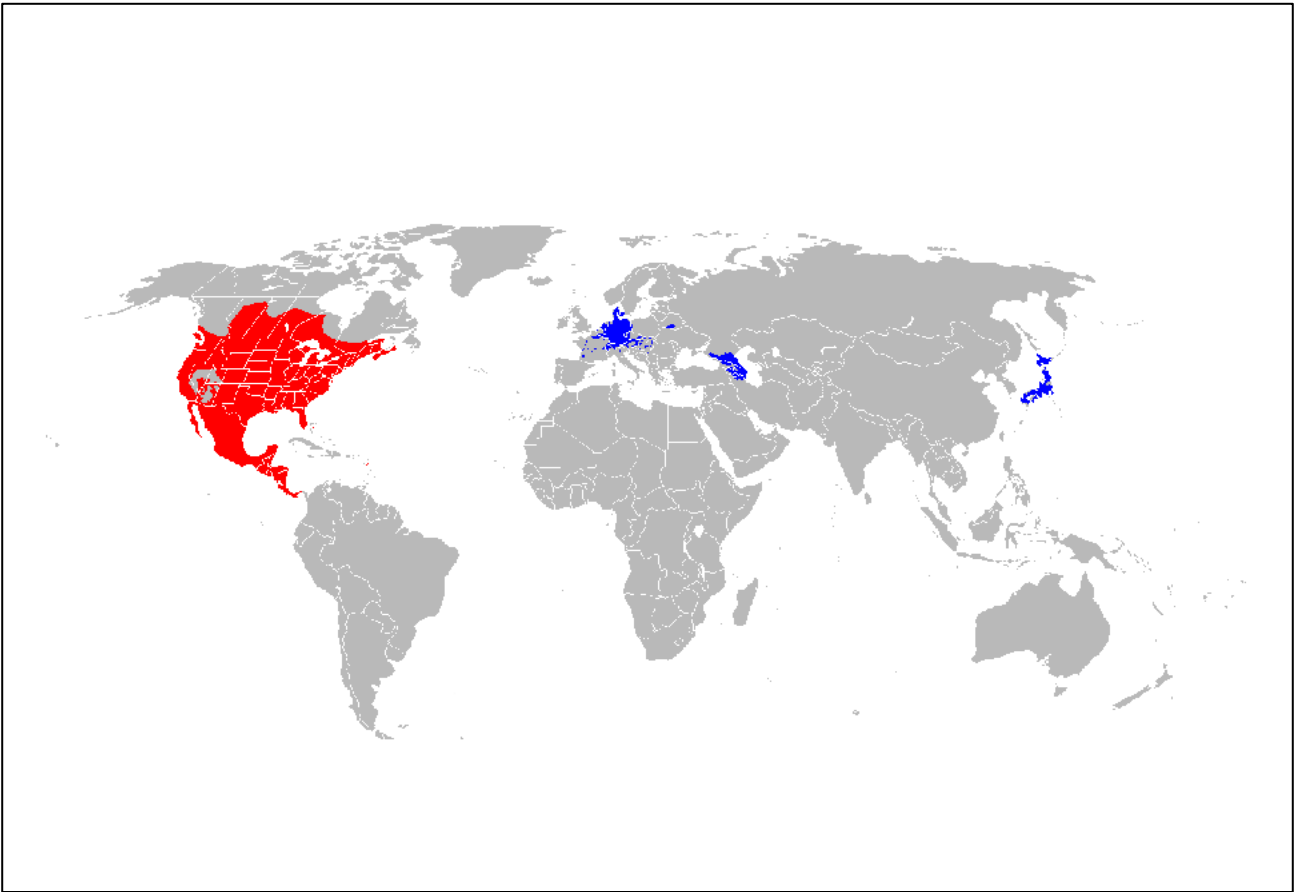


A baby raccoon, called a kit, stays close to its mother until it learns to find food and climb. Kits are born in the spring, usually in April or May, after a **gestation period of about 65 days**. A mother raccoon typically gives birth to 2-5 kits. These tiny kits are born blind , deaf, and covered in a soft gray fur. For the first **three weeks**, the kits stay tucked away in a safe den, where the mother protects and feeds them. By about **four weeks**, their eyes begin to open , and they start to explore their surroundings. The mother raccoon teaches her kits how to survive by showing them what to eat and how to explore safely. Can you see the family of raccoons sticking together in the picture?





Occasionally, an **albino raccoon** is born. These raccoons are very rare and have white fur, pink eyes , and pink noses. Without the usual dark markings, albino raccoons are easier for predators to spot, which makes their survival more difficult in the wild. If you ever see one, it's like spotting a treasure in nature!



Raccoons are great travelers! They started in North America, where they love the forests, fields, and even cities! Now, you can also find them in parts of Europe , Asia , and Japan . They're so clever and adaptable that they've made themselves at home in all sorts of places. Can you spot where raccoons live on this map?





food

small crayfish



food

berries

The label should be folded in two showing the name of the food on the other side



food

acorns



food

turtles

The label should be folded in two showing the name of the food on the other side





food

small rodents



food

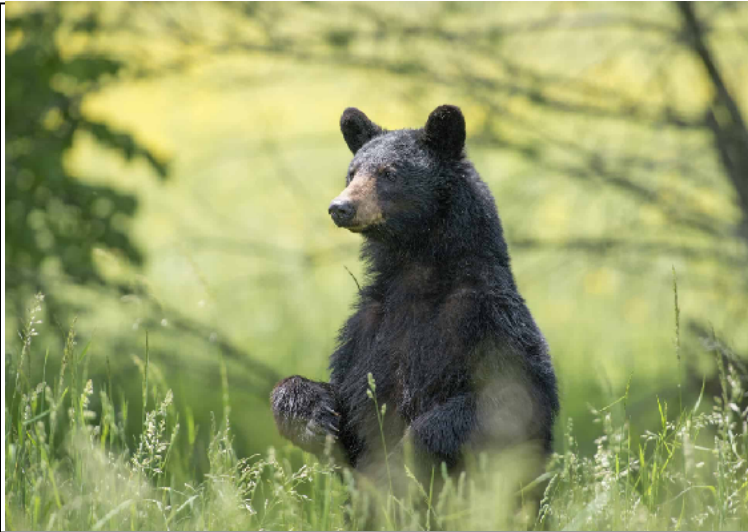
fish

The label should be folded in two showing the name of the food on the other side



predator

coyotes



predator

bears

The label should be folded in two showing the name of the food on the other side





predator

wolves



predator

eagles

The label should be folded in two showing the name of the food on the other side



predator

dogs



predator

owls

The label should be folded in two showing the name of the food on the other side