



# MOUNT RUSHMORE AT A GLANCE

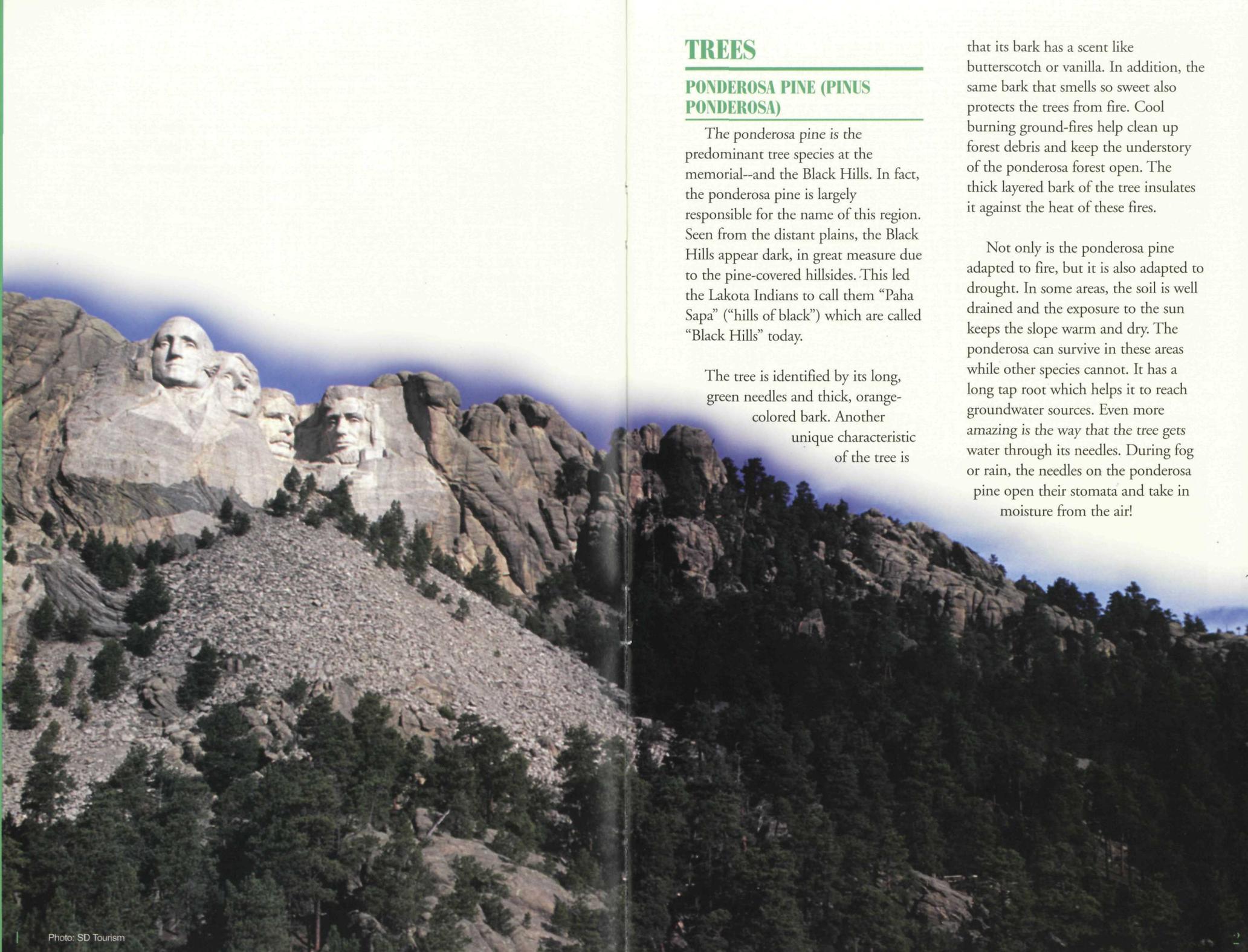
The Central Characters, Resources & History of Mount Rushmore



# THE NATURAL RESOURCES

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Trees, Plants & Wildlife



## TREES

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### PONDEROSA PINE (PINUS PONDEROSA)

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The ponderosa pine is the predominant tree species at the memorial--and the Black Hills. In fact, the ponderosa pine is largely responsible for the name of this region. Seen from the distant plains, the Black Hills appear dark, in great measure due to the pine-covered hillsides. This led the Lakota Indians to call them "Paha Sapa" ("hills of black") which are called "Black Hills" today.

The tree is identified by its long, green needles and thick, orange-colored bark. Another unique characteristic of the tree is

that its bark has a scent like butterscotch or vanilla. In addition, the same bark that smells so sweet also protects the trees from fire. Cool burning ground-fires help clean up forest debris and keep the understory of the ponderosa forest open. The thick layered bark of the tree insulates it against the heat of these fires.

Not only is the ponderosa pine adapted to fire, but it is also adapted to drought. In some areas, the soil is well drained and the exposure to the sun keeps the slope warm and dry. The ponderosa can survive in these areas while other species cannot. It has a long tap root which helps it to reach groundwater sources. Even more *amazing* is the way that the tree gets water through its needles. During fog or rain, the needles on the ponderosa pine open their stomata and take in moisture from the air!

## QUAKING ASPEN (POPULUS TREMULOIDES)

Quaking Aspen is the most widely distributed tree in North America. At Mount Rushmore, the trees are commonly seen along the forest edge and in open, undisturbed areas. Quaking Aspens grow to approximately 20 to 60 feet tall and one to two feet in diameter. This tree is best known for its leaves which are one to three inches in diameter and quiver at the slightest breeze (hence the common name). The bright green leaves have small, rounded teeth along their edges and turn a brilliant gold in the fall. Black, warty patches mark the smooth, greenish-white to cream-colored bark of the aspen.



*Quaking Aspen and Paper Birch*

Photo: SD Tourism

## PAPER BIRCH (BETULA PAPYRIFERA)

Paper Birch is found in small numbers near the Sculptor's Studio and along Lafferty Gulch. Growing to a height of eighty feet and two feet in diameter, this tree is best known for the use of its bark in the making of canoes by Indians of the Northern United States and Canada. The bark of mature trees is white, peeling into long, narrow horizontal strips that are curled at the ends. The bark at the base of older trees is black and fissured. Paper Birch leaves are roughly oval and two to three inches long with double-toothed edges. Interestingly, areas destroyed by fire are quickly reseeded by the Paper Birch.

## OTHER PLANTS

Many other plants and shrubs are found at the memorial including kinnikinnick or bearberry, common juniper, fireweed and wild geranium. Two of the most visible flowers of the memorial are described below.



Photo: SD Tourism

*Purple Coneflower*

## PURPLE CONEFLOWER (ECHINACEA ANGUSTIFOLIA)

One of the prominent species of prairie knolls in the northern plains, this plant has stems from one to two feet tall with a few lance-shaped leaves. The outer ray florets of the flower head are rose-purple and usually drooping. The dome-like center consists of disk florets and pointed bracts of equal length. A hardy perennial, coneflowers have rough, blackened rootstocks which Prairie Indians used for medicine.

## BLUE FLAX (LINUM PERENNE)

Blue flax is common on hills and eroded banks in the northern plains and can be spotted along many of the pathways at the memorial. The stems

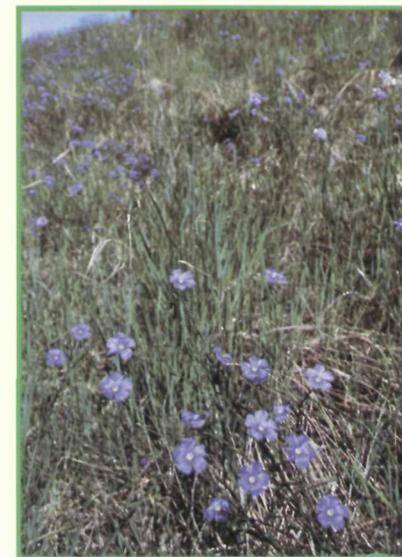


Photo: SD Tourism

*Blue Flax*

are branched and about ten inches tall with narrow leaves. Because of the slender nature of the stems and leaves, this plant may go unnoticed until it flowers. When it does, each branch ends with a dainty blue flower with five petals.

## WILDLIFE COMMON TO MOUNT RUSHMORE

### MOUNTAIN GOAT (OREAMNOS AMERICANUS)

Mountain goats are very skillful climbers that demand a specialized habitat, such as the craggy granite of the Black Hills. They have long, shaggy white coats that contrast sharply with their black horns, nose and hooves. Their soft hooves allow them to "grip" steep rock faces. Surprisingly, mountain goats are not



Photo: SD Tourism

*Mountain Goat*

native to the Black Hills. The population can be traced back to six goats, a 1924 gift to Custer State Park from Canada. The goats escaped from their pens and found their home among the Black Hill's granite peaks. There are now approximately 200 to 300 mountain goats in the area. The goats at the memorial are frequently seen near roadways, parking lots and other areas in close proximity to visitors. While not tame, the goats have become accustomed to humans and are a very popular attraction for the memorial's visitors.

### **LEAST CHIPMUNK (EUTAMIAS MINIMUS)**

Least Chipmunks are gray to quite dark in color and are marked with white, black, grayish and buff stripes.

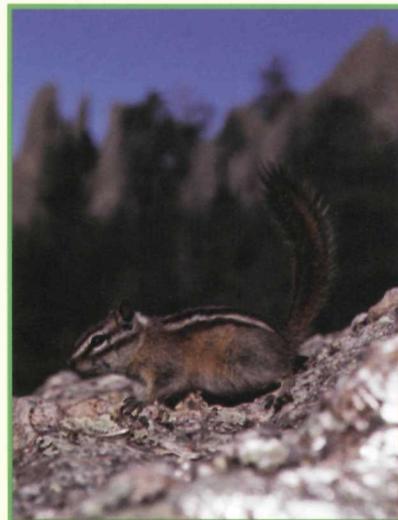


Photo: SD Tourism

*Least Chipmunk*

Unlike ground squirrels, chipmunks have stripes on their faces. In the Black Hills these chipmunks live in communities. Their diet includes

seeds, nuts and fruits, many of which are stored for the colder months. In the winter, these chipmunks cease activity, except to periodically eat stored food. When threatened, Least Chipmunks may either hide in rocks and burrows or climb a tree. However, many of these animals have become quite tame at Mount Rushmore.

### **TURKEY VULTURE**

In terms of bird life, one of the most interesting species seen at the memorial is the Turkey Vulture. Turkey Vultures are often seen perched on top of the monument early in the morning and soaring over the faces later in the day. They are easily mistaken for Bald Eagles, because they are one of the most graceful soaring birds in the world.

The vulture follows thermals and updrafts with a keen instinct by "feeling" the air with his wing-tip fingers. What is different about the vulture is that they hold their wings in a "V" shape and seldom flap. Most other birds hold their wings out straight and flap frequently.

### **DARK-EYED JUNCO**

The White-winged Junco, unique to the Black Hills, is a distinctive race of the Dark-eyed Junco. This small bird has a medium gray head, breast and upperparts with a white belly. It has white bars on its wings, thus, the name.

### **WHITE TAIL DEER (ODOCOILEUS VIRGINIANUS)**

White tail deer are considered the most common native big-game animal



Photo: SD Tourism

*White Tail Deer*

in the Black Hills. They are highly adaptable and are found in all complexes in the Black Hills and the surrounding area. The deer at the memorial are most frequently seen in the early morning and evening. Their white tails are reddish in the summer, turning silver-gray in the winter. They can run up to 30 miles per hour, flipping their flag-like tail in warning.

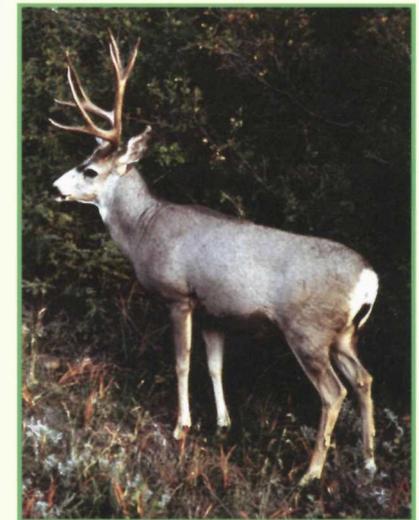


Photo: SD Tourism

*Mule Deer*

### **MULE DEER (ODOCOILEUS HEMIONUS)**

Mule deer are large stocky animals. They have dusty to silver-gray coats and large, mule-like ears. The large

bucks grow antlers seasonally. They eat shrubs, trees, forbs and grasses. These natives can be found in the Black Hills and the surrounding prairie.

### **THIRTEEN-LINED GROUND SQUIRREL (SPERMOPHILUS TRIDECIMLINEATUS)**

This small, slender ground squirrel has alternating dark and pale stripes with white spots along each of the dark stripes. These squirrels eat seeds, leaves, roots of grasses and insects. Their burrows are up to 30-foot long and three-foot deep, often in a hillside.

### **RED SQUIRREL (TAMIASCIURUS HUDSONICUS)**

Red squirrels live in all forested areas in the hills. Their coats are bright red. This friendly rodent spends the

better part of the warmer months harvesting pinecones, seeds and nuts for the cold winters.

## **WILDLIFE COMMON TO THE BLACK HILLS**

### **BUFFALO OR TATANKA**

Buffalo are the largest living member in the cow family. Live adult weights range from 1,400 to 2,500 pounds for bulls and 750 to 1,600 pounds for cows. Bull buffalo have massive front quarters with a large hump above the shoulders. They are covered with woolly hair up to 1.5 inches long that also covers the head and forelegs. This hair will turn tan with age and is two to five times thicker than hind quarter hair. The head has a broad triangular appearance

with a beard. Calves are reddish-tan at birth and change to brown or black at three months. The hump and horns begin developing at six months of age.

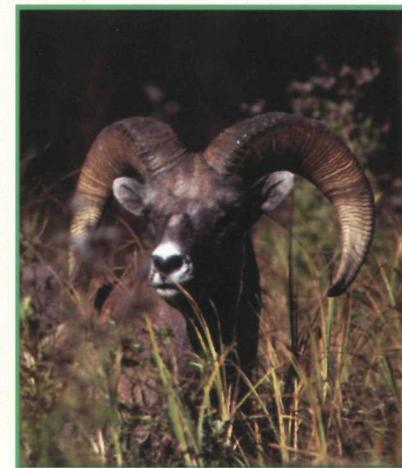
Both males and females exhibit horns. Male horns can reach 20" long while female horns are always smaller. Adult buffalo can run sprints of 35 miles per hour for up to 1/4 of a mile and longer distances at slower speeds. Buffalo are also capable of jumping over six-foot high fences without touching the fence. While buffalo may live as long as 28 years, few reach 12 to 15 years.

From the safety of their car, visitors can take an upclose look at a buffalo while driving through nearby Custer State Park which has a herd of approximately 1,500 buffalo.

### **ELK OR WAPITI (CERVUS ELAPHUS)**

Elk or wapiti reside on higher ridges during the day and open, rolling

meadows during the twilight hours. Residing mainly in Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park, elk are the second largest mammals in the hills, next only to the bison. A bull elk can weigh up to one thousand pounds, stand five feet at the shoulders and have antlers up to five feet high.



*Bighorn Sheep*

Photo: SD Tourism

### **BIGHORN SHEEP (OVIS CANADENSIS)**

Bighorn sheep are not native to Custer State Park but were introduced to replace the extinct Audubon's Sheep. These stocky sheep don't have wool, but rather dark-brown hair with a cream-colored rump. This animal's most distinguishing characteristic is the ram's massive curled horns. The females have spiked horns that are only slightly curled.

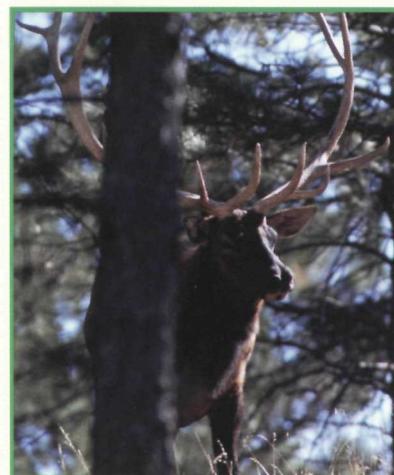
### **PRONGHORN (ANTILOCAPRA AMERICANA)**

Pronghorn, more commonly referred to as antelope, are found almost exclusively in the grasslands



*Tatanka*

Photo: SD Tourism



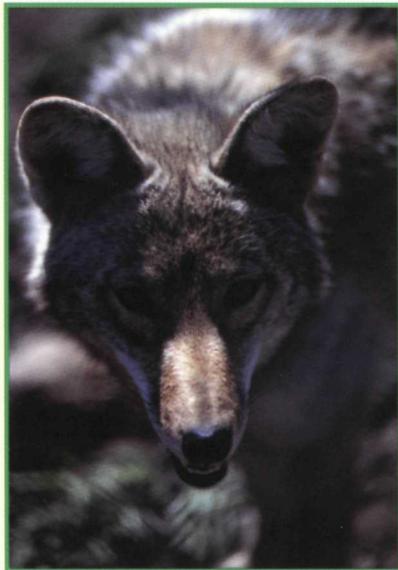
*Elk*

Photo: SD Tourism

surrounding the Black Hills. They can usually be found on the grassy plains of Custer State Park and Wind Cave National Park. The tan and white coloring of the pronghorn blends with the colors of the grass to provide protection. If threatened, they can maintain speeds of up to 50 miles per hour. Both males and females have black, slightly curved horns, which are made of keratin, the same protein that makes up human fingernails.

### **BLACKTAIL PRAIRIE DOG (CYNOMYS LUDOVICIANUS)**

The blacktail prairie dog is as famous in the Black Hills as the bison. The prairie dog is not really a dog at all. Rather, it is a small, yellow rodent that gets its name from the dog-like “bark” the animal uses as a warning signal when predators draw near. They live in large social areas known as “towns.” Their towns can take up many



*Coyote*

Photo: SD Tourism

square miles and are easily recognized by the built-up mounds of dirt that serve as the entrances to their burrows.

### **COYOTE (CANIS LATRANS)**

Coyotes are hearty gray wild dogs about the size of a collie. The packs usually travel in families, which consist of the parents and up to six pups of varying size. Coyotes are more likely to be seen on the prairie but are also common in the forest.

### **BOBCAT (LYNX RUFUS)**

Another small predator is the bobcat. Bobcats are slightly larger than a big housecat with dark brown fur and lighter spots, a bobbed tail and small tufts on their ears. Bobcats generally inhabit wooded areas and are very rarely seen because they are nocturnal.



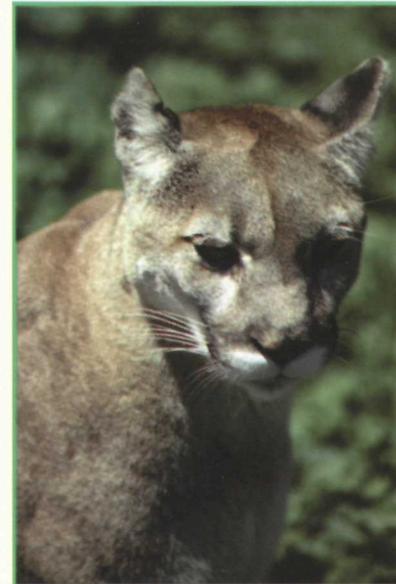
*Cottontail Rabbit*

### **COTTONTAIL RABBIT (SYLVILAGUS NUTTALLII)**

Cottontails are small rabbits with white tails that look like powder puffs and reddish-brown to grayish-brown

Photo: SD Tourism

coats. They usually live near brushy draws that afford shelter and food. Cottontails are vegetarians that eat everything from the roots and tops of grasses to herbs and bark of trees.



*Mountain Lion*

Photo: SD Tourism

## **OTHER MAMMALS IN THE BLACK HILLS**

Smaller mammals including badgers, raccoons, beavers and skunks may occasionally be seen throughout the Black Hills and surrounding prairie. Porcupines often leave their mark on pine trees after feasting on the bark. Mountain lions live in the area but are rarely seen. Black bear and wolf once resided in the Black Hills but have disappeared from this area.

## **FAST FACTS ABOUT MOUNT RUSHMORE'S MOST POPULAR ANIMAL - THE MOUNTAIN GOAT**

Mountain goats were brought to the Black Hills of southwestern South Dakota in 1924. A controlled population of 170 to 200 animals now lives in the Black Hills area.

A male goat is called a “billy,” while a female is a “nanny,” and a baby goat is a “kid.”

Mountain goats are skilled climbers due to their long split hooves that can spread for leverage. The hooves also have soft pads that cling to the rocks.

Long hair and wool “subfur” keep the mountain goat warm through the winter.

They eat almost anything. Lichens are abundant in the goats’ range and are eaten year round.

The best times to see goats are early morning or during sunny periods following an afternoon rain shower. Mountain goats rest during the middle of the day.

Mountain goats are wild animals and should be viewed from a distance.

Remember, please do not feed any wild animals.



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