

## WILDLIFE

### In Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Great Smoky Mountains National Park contains the largest remaining areas of wilderness sanctuary in the East. Despite its vastness, the park is primarily composed of land that was altered substantially by white settlers and commercial enterprises over the past two centuries. Though the land now within the park boundaries has again reverted to forest, wildlife here reflects those changes. Animal life continues to thrive in the Smokies, but some of the species the Indians knew are gone. There are new animals too, brought in by people who either did not know or did not care about problems created by the presence of exotic species in communities of native animals. This folder will acquaint you with a few of the more prominent and notable animals of the Smokies. Not every species that occurs here is mentioned, but the best-known animals are included.

## MAMMALS

Mammals are probably of greatest interest to most visitors. Within the park there are now about 50 species of mammals, including 24 kinds of rodents.

### LARGE MAMMALS FREQUENTLY SEEN . . .



Black Bear cub

**Black bear.** So widely known are the bears that whenever traffic is stopped, the thought comes to mind that bears may be begging along the roadside. If the national parks are to be honest in their role as natural preserves, though, it is wrong to tolerate a situation in which animals forget how to fend for themselves in the wild. When they do forget, they become vulnerable to poachers. And, it is risky to permit a situation to exist in which people occasionally are injured by bears that have lost their fear of man.

Therefore, the National Park Service removes panhandling bears to places where they can do no harm to people, forbids the feeding and teasing of bears, and has installed bear-proof garbage cans at campgrounds and other locations. These animals are not putting on roadside shows so often any more. Instead they are living healthier lives in the backcountry.

Under normal conditions, the black bear's appetite for almost anything usually assures it an adequate variety of sources from which to appease its hunger. An average adult weighs 200-300 pounds and spends much of its time seeking wild fruits, nuts, berries, insects, and small animals. During the winter, bears den up in trees, caves, or wherever they can find shelter. Cubs are born during this time—usually one or two to a mature female. At least 400 bears live in the park.

**White-tailed deer.** Before establishment of the national park in the 1930s, there were far fewer deer in the Smokies than today. Hunting with dogs, mountain people greatly depleted the deer population. Today, deer are so numerous in Cades Cove (where they find open fields with plenty of tender plant shoots) that herds of them can often be seen at dawn and dusk.

Deer prefer deciduous woodlands with occasional clearings. Except when they are seeking shelter in winter they are seldom found in conifer forest. During the day these animals stay relatively quiet, but from dusk until dawn they move about seeking food. Fawns—often two—are born in late spring.

### LARGE MAMMALS SELDOM SEEN . . .

Only one animal fits this category, and it is not a native species.

**Exotic wild hog.** Predecessors of these large, bristly pigs escaped from a hunting preserve south of the park about 1912. By the late 1950s hogs had reached the park and were increasing rapidly in numbers. Rooting up wildflowers and competing with bears and other native animals for nuts and berries, they have become an ecological menace. The combination of their ability to breed large litters, the lack of predators, and habitat that is ideal for them has caused their numbers to increase until as many as 2000 hogs may now be living in the park. Wild hogs are mostly nocturnal, and you are not likely to see them.

The National Park Service is seeking to control the hogs and is engaging in research that will provide necessary information to effectively manage them.

### LARGE MAMMALS ELIMINATED BY SETTLERS . . .

**Mountain lion (cougar).** Predators have been hunted so relentlessly in most parts of the world that their presence has come to be identified with that of true wilderness. For those who love the wild, forested reaches of the Appalachians, it is a long hoped-for reaffirmation of wilderness that mountain lions may again be present in these ranges.

Sporadic but persistent reports of sightings of mountain lions in the park are being followed up by investigation. Attaining weights of 200 pounds and lengths of 8 feet (including their long tails) these large, fawn-colored or gray predators are unlike any other animals in the park. But until hard proof is obtained, their presence must be categorized as questionable.

**Bison, American elk (wapiti), and gray wolves** once ranged the park area. The bison were killed by the late 1700s, the elk by the 1840s, and the wolves by around 1900.

### SMALL MAMMALS FREQUENTLY SEEN . . .

**Woodchuck (groundhog).** Because they frequent roadsides and open fields, woodchucks are easily seen. These burrowing rodents subsist on plants, a diet which seems to make them conspicuously obese. This is especially true in the autumn when they have stored up fat for winter hibernation.



Red squirrel

**Squirrels.** There are 5 kinds of tree squirrels in the park and one kind of small ground squirrel. The first category includes gray squirrels, red squirrels, two species of flying squirrels, and the fox squirrel, which is rare. The gray squirrels are found at low-to-mid elevations and are identical to those seen in many eastern cities. Red squirrels are a northern species; here they live primarily at higher elevations. Because they chatter so insistently at intruders, they are called "boomers". Flying squirrels are nocturnal, so they are rarely seen without special effort. The eastern chipmunk is a small ground squirrel. Unlike woodchucks, chipmunks take great care to conceal the locations of burrows and make a practice of storing food.

**Cottontail rabbit.** Occasionally visitors walking through fields or exploring the woods startle cottontails. These animals are found in most of North America. In the park they are most likely to be found outside the conifer forests.

### SMALL MAMMALS SELDOM SEEN . . .

None of these species is rare, but the nocturnal or secretive habits of many of them make casual sightings rather infrequent.

**Opossums, raccoons, and skunks** are more often heard foraging in campgrounds at night than they are seen. All of these animals subsist on a wide variety of foods and can be found in every section of the park.

**Bobcats, red foxes and gray foxes, weasels, and mink** are all predators. At dusk bobcats and foxes are sometimes seen along roads. Bobcats are carnivorous, preying on mice, birds, squirrels, woodchucks, and occasionally animals as large as deer, though the small size of these cats (under 25 pounds) usually restricts them to small prey. Bobcats have short tails.

Red foxes and gray foxes are omnivorous. Both species are common in the park, but gray foxes are more numerous. Of the two, red foxes are slightly larger (12 pounds compared with an average 9 pounds for gray foxes). Weasels and mink are about squirrel-size predators, generally brownish in color, and occur throughout the park.

**Members of the mouse family** are numerous. These animals, the majority of which live in fields, range in size from the tiny eastern harvest mouse to the muskrat. Not closely related to muskrats, but somewhat similar in their habits, are **beaver**. After a long absence this species is again present in the park in small numbers.

Small animals eliminated prior to establishment of the park include otter and perhaps fisher, both of which lived along streams.

## BIRDS

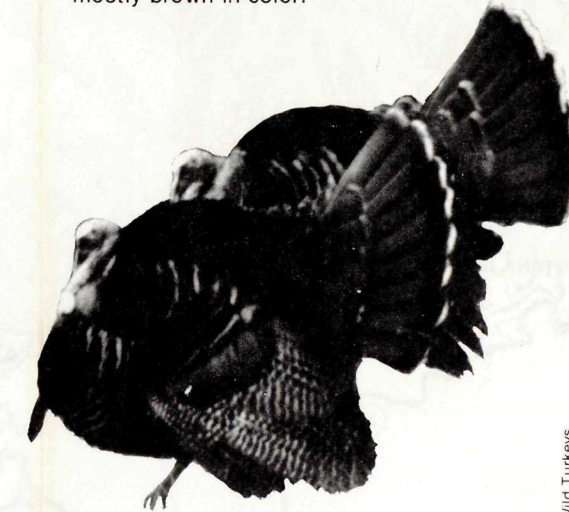
Birds, except for a few species, often remain hidden in thick forest where they are more often heard than seen by the casual visitor. The park supports about 200 species of birds, including about 70-80 which are present during the winter. Elevation affects birdlife, creating a situation in which one can expect to find birds in the high country which are typical of northern New England. Some birds migrate down the mountains during the winter to escape severe conditions on the high ridges. Dark-eyed juncos are an example.

Species you are likely to notice are . . .

**Dark-eyed Junco.** These are the small, gray birds with white outer tail feathers (noticeable in flight) that frequent the parking lots at Newfound Gap and Clingmans Dome.

**Crow and Raven.** Both of these species are black. The much-larger raven is rarely seen outside wilderness areas in the East. Crows "caw" but ravens "croak". You are not likely to see ravens unless you are in the high country.

**Ruffed grouse** may be encountered in the woods at almost any elevation. Without warning, they may explode from the leaves to wing off through the trees. Grouse are chicken-size ground-feeding birds and are mostly brown in color.



Wild Turkey

**Wild turkeys** are most likely to be seen in Cades Cove in open fields during the early morning and evening hours. Though these birds are wary, hikers may occasionally glimpse them too.

## SNAKES

Snakes are common in the park. There are 23 species, including two that are poisonous. These are . . .

**Timber rattlesnakes and copperheads.** The former species commonly reaches 3 feet in length, is thick-bodied with patterned markings of brown and black, and usually will buzz when it detects the approach of people. To avoid rattlesnakes, stay on trails and off rocky, warm slopes. Rattlesnakes are rarely found at the highest elevations or during the winter. Copperheads are scarce above 2500 feet elevation. Rocky hillsides, stone fences, and abandoned buildings are likely places to encounter them. Neither rattlesnakes nor copperheads are aggressive and their presence should not prevent you from having an enjoyable visit. Like all native animals they are protected in the park, and should be left unharmed. If they are found in areas heavily used by people, they should be reported to park rangers.

Some non-poisonous snakes are . . . Eastern garter snake and northern water snake. These are probably the most commonly-seen species in the park. The black rat snake, northern black racer, northern ringneck snake, eastern kingsnake, and the corn snake are included among others found here.



Black-chinned Red Salamander

Long-tailed Salamander



Leopard Frog

## AMPHIBIANS

Amphibians include about a dozen toads and frogs and 23 kinds of salamanders, which is more than can be found anywhere else in North America. One species, the red-cheeked salamander, lives only within the park.

## LIZARDS

Lizards most often found include the northern fence lizard and five-lined skink.

## FISHES

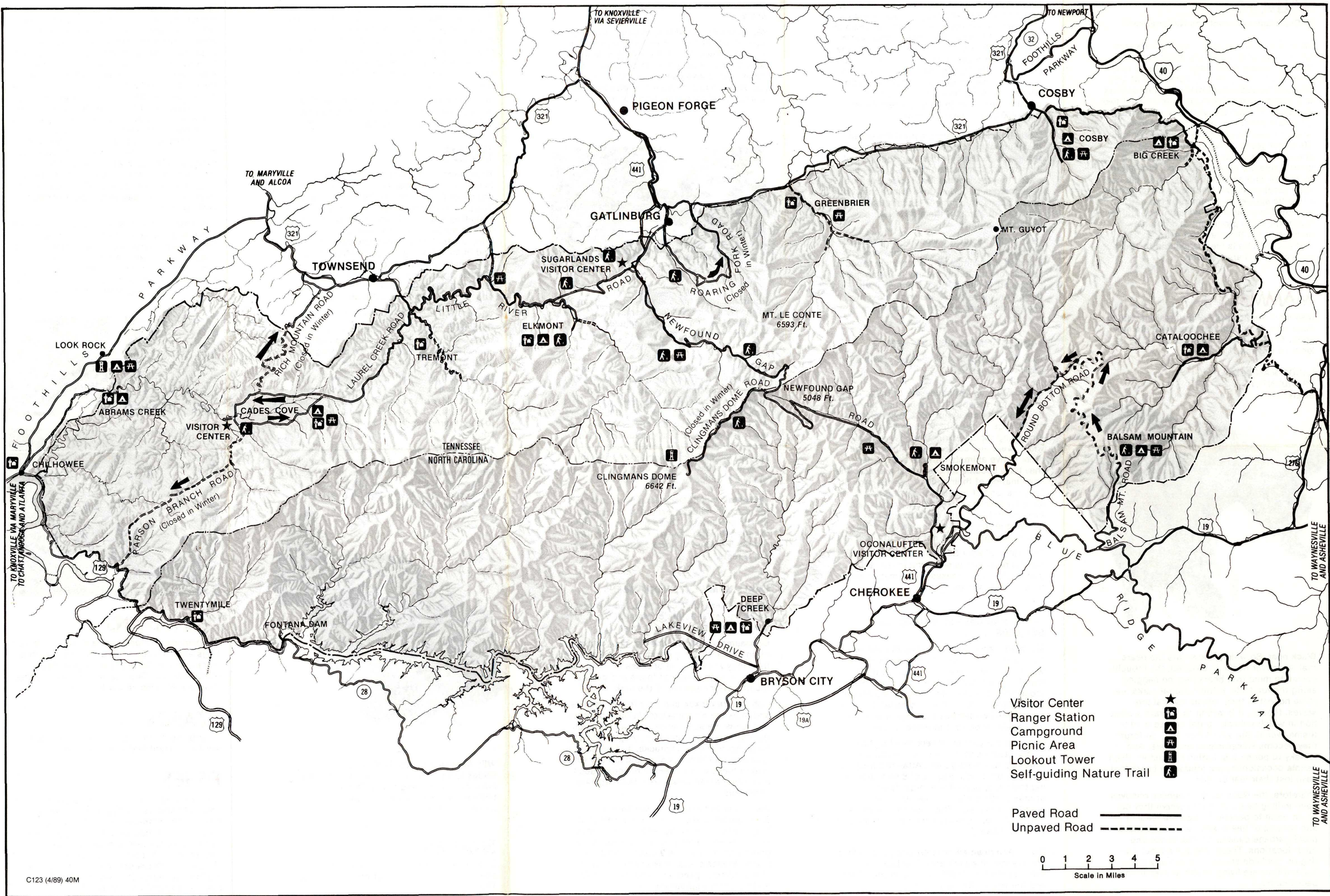
Fishes include about 70 kinds living in waters both cold and warm. There are almost 600 miles of trout streams here. Of special interest to fishermen are rainbow and brown trout. These species were once stocked in park streams, but they have successfully competed with the native brook trout, reducing their numbers. Catching the latter species is therefore prohibited.

### Administration

Great Smoky Mountains National Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Superintendent's address is Gatlinburg, TN 37738.

This folder is published by the Great Smoky Mountains Natural History Association, a nonprofit organization cooperating with the National Park Service in the interpretive programs of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The association offers at nominal cost publications intended to develop a broad public understanding of park geology, biology, history, and related subjects.





### WILDLIFE VIEWING

You can increase your chances of seeing wildlife in these ways . . .

- carry binoculars
- drive slowly along park roads at dawn or dusk
- when walking or driving, stop often to watch and listen for wildlife.

### WILDLIFE POLICIES & PROBLEMS

In the national parks, all native animals are completely protected by law. The parks have been established by the people in recognition of their uniqueness and are managed as preserves where present and future generations may enjoy and study remnants of primeval America. Wildlife, being a part of the natural scheme, may be expected to subsist here in the Smokies without human management. While this is generally true, there are problems that require attention . . .

**Poaching.** Before there was a park, people lived in the Smokies and hunted as they pleased. For some of their descendants such traditions die hard. Other people travel to the Smokies and violate park boundaries to hunt for commercial and personal gain.

**Exotic (non-native) species.** Currently the wild hog (see elsewhere in this folder) is unrivaled for its destruction of park ecology. Pets running loose and chasing wildlife are an ongoing problem. There is also growing concern over the inroads of brown and rainbow trout on the native brook trout.

**Maintaining natural populations.** Numbers of certain species of animals—usually plant eaters—increase dramatically when predators are absent or found in much less than normal numbers. The plant-eating population may take on unnatural characteristics, cause severe stress on other parts of the ecosystem, and then die off in unusually large numbers. In some national parks, animals have been removed rather than to allow this cycle to run its course.

**Publications** available at visitor centers will provide additional information on wildlife.

- For your safety**
- Do not feed, tease, or approach wildlife.
  - Be especially cautious if you encounter wildlife with young.