

COMMON MAMMALS OF OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

Roosevelt Elk

The largest and most majestic of all the animals to be found in Olympic National Park is the Roosevelt or Olympic elk. They were given the name Roosevelt elk in honor of President Theodore Roosevelt who did much to help preserve them from extinction. They are also known by the name "wapiti" which was given to them by the Shawnee indians.

Of the two kinds of elk in the Pacific Northwest, the Roosevelt elk are the largest. Next to the moose, the elk is the largest member of the deer family. The male sometimes measures 5 feet high at the shoulder and often weighs 800 pounds or more. Their coats are a tawny color except for the neck which is dark brown. It is easy to tell elk from deer because of the large size and the large buff colored rump patch.

When the calves are born in May or June, they weigh between 30 and 40 pounds and are tawny colored splashed with many light spots and a conspicuous rump patch. Only the bull elk has antlers. They may measure as much as 5 feet across. Each year they shed the old set of antlers after mating season in the fall and almost immediately begin to grow a new set.

During the summer months, some of the elk herds can be found in the high mountains; the elk move down into the rain forest valleys on the western side of the park during the winter months. About 5,000 elk live in Olympic National Park where they, like all of the animals are protected in their natural environment.

Douglas Squirrel

Many campers in Olympic National Park are fascinated by the little chickaree or Douglas squirrel. This noisy little squirrel of the evergreen forests is reddish in summer with a yellowish belly. They are never still a moment and frequently bound from one tree to another, pausing only long enough to scold an intruder with their chattering voice. They are a very small animal, only about 6 to 7 inches long with a tail about 5 inches long. Their main food is the seeds from evergreen cones which they store for their winter food. The chickaree is active all winter and can often be seen scampering across the snow. The young are born between June and October and there are from 4 to 8 in a litter.

Chipmunk

Another busy worker in the forest is the chipmunk. Although they sleep about half of the year, they make up for lost time in the summer. They also scold intruders. Often they will make a snug home or nest in a hollow tree trunk. During the summer months, they also collect seeds for their winter food. Their dark brown back and sides have dull yellowish or grayish stripes along the back and sides. They are just a little smaller than the Douglas squirrel. The young are born in May and there may be from 3 to 6 in a litter.

Black-tailed Deer

One of the most beautiful animals in the park is the black-tailed deer. You are more likely to see this animal than any other. The male deer, called a "buck" grows a new set of antlers each year after having shed the old ones. The female, or doe, does not grow antlers.

Fawns are born in late May and early June. Often there are twins or even triplets. Their reddish coat with its white spots blends well with the forest where their mother hides them while she feeds nearby. If you should happen to find a fawn hidden in the forest, do not think that it is abandoned and try to take it home with you. Fawns usually cannot live without their mother's care. In fact, they aren't really lost or without a mother in most cases. The doe often will be nearby, watching until you leave her baby alone.

Many people think they are being kind by feeding the seemingly friendly deer but they are wrong. Deer have sharp hooves and can strike swiftly and without warning. Also, human food makes deer and other animals sick and they often die from it.

Black Bear

In Olympic National Park, black bears are always black in color. In other parts of the country, the black bears may be brown or cinnamon colored. Although there aren't any beggar bears alongside the roads in this park, you should not try to feed them if you are lucky enough to see them. They are wild animals and can be very dangerous. If they see you, they will ordinarily run away. The bear's sense of hearing and smell are good but their eyesight is poor. Bears are meat eaters but also love sweet things such as wild honey and berries. They can often be found in a berry patch when the berries are ripe.

Black bears are good climbers and often scramble up a tree when they are frightened. They are so big that they have few natural enemies. Mother bears are very strict with their cubs and will spank them if they disobey. A mother bear protecting her cubs is a most dangerous animal. Never get between a mother bear and her cubs!

Cougar or Mountain Lion

Probably the most misunderstood mammal in the Pacific Northwest is the mountain lion. They have a great fear of man and are very seldom seen, so man has very little reason to be afraid of them. In various parts of the country they are known as panther, cougar, catamount, painter and puma. In the Northwest they are called cougar.

In many ways mountain lions are like big, overgrown house cats. Their tracks are similar although many times larger. Their body is about 4 feet long in a full-grown animal and the tail may be as long as 2½ to 3 feet in length. They are tawny to grayish with a dark brown on the tip of their tail. They may weigh from 80 to almost 200 pounds.

They are chiefly a nocturnal animal but may be abroad some during the day. Cougars, like bears, are good tree climbers. They usually live in among rocks or small caves where they rear their young until they are old enough to go out on their own. Kittens may be born in any month of the year and there may be anywhere from 1 to 6 young in the litter. When newborn, the kittens have black spots on their yellow-brown coats and are not easily seen in the vegetation. Cougars are carnivores, as are all cats. They feed largely on deer, but will also take rabbits and rodents of various kinds.

Mountain Goats

The mountain goat in Olympic National Park is not a native animal. The ancestors of the present population were captured in British Columbia, Canada, and in Alaska and were brought here during the late 1920's. Originally there was a total of twelve released in the Olympic Mountains. Now, if you are lucky enough to see them, you might find that there are that many in just one herd. There are herds of goats in several sections of the high rocky peaks in the park.

Although they are called a goat, this mammal is more closely related to the antelope. They are about 3 feet tall and may weight well over 100 pounds. They may be found on the rocky crags near snowline. Their coat of long fur is white and they have a beard and short black horns.

The kids are born in spring and early summer. They are a very curious animal and will sometimes invade a hiker's camp looking for food while the hiker is away. In fact, they will eat anything and everything that is even faintly edible and are fond of chewing on camera straps.

Marmots

Although there are gray and white marmots and yellowbelly marmots in other parts of the country, the Olympic marmot can only be found in the upper slopes of the Olympic Mountains. They are most easily seen in the Hurricane Ridge area where burrows are found in the open meadows and sometimes among the rocks.

They are about a foot and a half long when full grown and have a tail about 7 to 10 inches long. This large member of the rodent family is most generally known for its shrill whistle when it is alarmed. They love to bathe in the sun on the rocks warmed by the heat of the sun. Plants are his food and a fresh supply is always handy in the high mountain meadows. All summer they eat so that when winter comes they are so fat that they can hibernate all the long winter from about September to late spring. The babies are born in late spring or early summer and there are usually 4 or 5 in a litter.

Bushytailed Wood rat

During the night the bushytailed wood rat goes about his business of gathering and storing food. They are not like the rats in cities. The bushy tail and gray and white coat is neat and clean. They are from 7 to over 9 inches long with a 6 to 7 inch tail. The peculiar habit of being attracted to shiny objects and packing them away has given this animal the name of "pack rat" or "trade rat". At times they make their homes in abandoned cabins in the backcountry of the park. If food is left out, they will help themselves to it. The young are born once a year and there are usually only 2 to 4 in a litter.