

The Fisher – Sighting A Shy Animal

- **Did you know that:**
 - The **Park's fisher population** is estimated at **about one hundred individuals**.
 - This **mammal**, which belongs to the same family as the weasel, **resembles a large, slender cat**.
 - This agile hunter is one of the rare predators that dare to attack a porcupine.

Description

The fisher (*Martes pennanti*) is a **carnivore** belonging to the **mustelid family** (weasels, martin, skunks, ermine, etc.). This short-legged animal has a long tail. It has a large head with a pointed nose, short, rounded ears and tiny eyes. Its thick fur varies from pale grey to black according to the individual animal.

Males are generally larger than females with a body weight of 2.6 to 5.5 kg, whereas the female weighs from 1.3 to 3.1 kg. The fisher's **average length** is **around one metre** (from the tip of its nose to the end of its tail).

Habitat

Fishers are found exclusively in North America, from the east to the west coast. They prefer large **dense forests composed of mature deciduous and coniferous trees**.

Feeding and Behaviour

The fisher's **food** is **quite varied**. It feeds on mammals (rabbits, porcupines, squirrels, voles, shrews) but also on birds, insects, fish, small fruits, nuts and carrion.

Fishers are **solitary**, except during the mating season, or when a young fisher follows its mother. **Shy and difficult to observe**, this animal is active day and night throughout the year, particularly in the early morning and at dusk. It often moves about on the ground, on the trunks of dead trees. The fisher is a **skilled climber**, however, and moves among the trees by jumping from branch to branch.

Mating takes place between March and April. **Gestation lasts approximately one year**, but the embryo develops only during the last two months of pregnancy. The **number of offspring** is **three on average** but may vary from one to six. **Young fishers develop slowly**. They are blind and deaf for a little over one month. They reach sexual maturity at the age of one or two years and live an average of 10 or 11 years.

When it feels threatened, the fisher spits and arches its back like a cat. Lynx, owls, black bears and cougars may occasionally attack fishers, but its **main predators** are **humans** who trap it for its fur in **non-protected areas**. The fisher is also affected by habitat destruction caused by logging and urban development.



Fisher prints in the snow (NCC)

Fishers in Gatineau Park

It should be noted that fishers are naturally found in Gatineau Park. The **size of the fisher's home range can vary significantly** according to the sex of the animal, but also according to the availability of food. Thus, a study conducted in Gatineau Park (Y. Garant, 1995) estimated the fisher's home range at 5.5 km² for females and 9.3 km² for males, while in British Columbia, it is approximately 35 km² for females and 137 km² for males. According to this same study, the **Park's fisher population** is estimated at around one hundred individuals, or close to **2.7 fishers/10 km²**.

Keep a watchful eye during your walks in the Park, especially if you are in the Taylor Lake sector in the early morning or at dusk. Who knows! Perhaps you will be one of those rare lucky people who catch a glimpse of this secretive and mysterious animal.