

# Animal Furs

## INTERPRETIVE CHEAT SHEET

### ACTIVITY

Have furs displayed and allow visitors to look at and touch. Have photo cards of the animals and ask visitors to match the cards to the furs. You could also have cards of extra animals to make the exercise more challenging.

### FUNCTION OF FURS

Why do animals have furs? Why are furs different and do they serve different functions for different animals?

- protection and comfort for the underlying skin and body – they wear their clothing and cushioning on themselves all day long
- heat insulation – note: mammals are warm blooded and need to preserve their internal temperature
- waterproof – which animals spend more time in the water? Are their furs different from the others?
- camouflage – this includes both colors and patterns; think about what environments these animals are trying to blend in with; why is the skunk coloration so different from the others? (hint: it wants potential predators to easily recognize it as a skunk). Why does the raccoon have a striped tail? (hint: it spends a lot of time up among the tree branches)

### OUR FURS

bobcat, raccoon, skunk, rabbit, fox, coyote, beaver, possum, white-tailed deer

These are all animals that frequent our canyons. Can you think of other mammals in our area that are not included in our collection? (e.g.: jackrabbit, western grey squirrel, otter, black bear, mountain lion, black-tailed deer, wood rat, mouse, bat, vole, gopher, mole, muskrat, ringtail). After the matching game you could further challenge visitors to name as many as they can from this list. If they are still interested, you could show them the animal tracks on pages 324-325 of the John Muir Laws Sierra Nevada Guide and challenge them to find and identify different tracks while out in the canyons.

**BOBCAT** – carnivore (usually rabbits, birds, mice, squirrels); 11-30 pounds; live in forests, swamps, deserts, suburban edges; avg. life span 10-12 years; can leap 10 feet; have 1-6 kittens who stay with mother 9-12 months; nocturnal and rarely seen

**RACCOON** – omnivore (crayfish, frogs, mice, insects, eggs, fruits and plants); 4-23 pounds; adapt well to human developed areas, including cities; have 1-7 cubs; climb trees; in cold climates they hibernate

**SKUNK** – omnivore (fruits, plants, insects, worms, larvae, eggs, rodents, reptiles) 1-14 pounds; nocturnal; average life span 3 years; have 2-10 cubs; can spray up to 10'

**RABBIT** – herbivore (mostly grasses); mountain cottontail is 1 ½-2 ½ pounds (compared to jackrabbit which weighs 6 ½ - 9 pounds); live in burrows; have 4-8 young and can have multiple litters per year

**FOX** – omnivore (rabbits, rodents, birds, amphibians, fruit, eggs) widespread from Arctic to subtropics; average life span 3-5 years; have underground dens and give birth to 4-6 kits

**COYOTE** – omnivore (rabbits, rodents, insects, fish, deer, snakes, fruit, grass) 20-50 pounds; live up to 14 years; can run up to 40 mph and have keen sight and smell; good swimmers; have 3-12 pups; previously lived only in prairies and deserts of Southwest but now spread throughout most of U.S.

**BEAVER** – herbivore (leaves, bark, twigs, roots and shoots); up to 60 pounds; live to 24 years; fur is oily and waterproof; have webbed feet; they burrow into banks, cut down trees, build dams, create ponds and build lodges with underwater entrances in ponds

**POSSUM** – omnivore (carrion, grass, nuts, fruit, mice, birds, insects); 9-13 pounds; only marsupial in U.S.; have up to 20 pups but most don't survive; live mostly in trees; play possum to fool predators

**DEER** – herbivore; forage mostly at dawn and dusk; can weigh over 200 pounds; live 9-11 years; have 1-3 fawns; bucks lose antlers in Jan-Feb, after mating season; our local deer are black-tailed (not like the white-tailed fur)