



Mammals in the Red River Valley

Early explorers to the Red River Valley discovered a wide range of wildlife living along the Red River in the Gallery Forest (the narrow band of forest along the river in the otherwise open prairie). Although these native species were plentiful along the Red at one time, many species have become extinct while others are now rare along the river. The following is a partial list of mammals native to the Red River Valley. The animals marked with a symbol are rarely seen along the Red River while the rest are quite common.

Herbivores

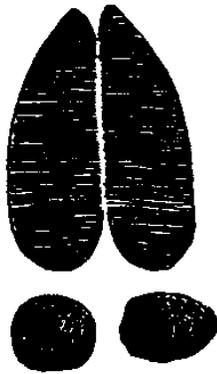
grass or plant-eating animal



Moose
Alces alces

Size

Head and body length: 7.5-10 feet
Tail length: 2.5-3.5 inches
Shoulder height: 5-6.5 feet
Track length: 6 inches



Features

Moose are one of the largest grazing animals in the region. The male's antlers are massive, flattened and pronged. A fleshy dewlap on the throat and an upper lip which overhangs the lower are the animal's most defining characteristics. Today moose are found mainly north and east of the Valley.



American elk
Cervus canadensis

Size

Head and body length: 7.5-9.5 feet
Tail length: 4.5-8 inches
Shoulder height: 4-5 feet
Track length: 4 inches



Features

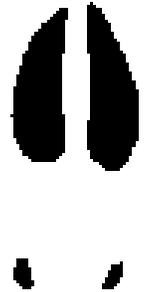
The American elk are large in size with red-brown fur, a pale rump and a short tail. The males have huge antlers. Elk were common along the Red River in pre-settlement times, but they are often hunted and are now quite rare.



White-tailed deer
Odocoileus virginianus

Size

Head and body length: 4-6 feet
Tail length: 7-11 inches
Shoulder height: 2.25-3.5 feet
Track length: 2.75 inches



Features

With white coloring underneath, the tail of this animal raises when it is alarmed. The male's antlers have a main beam with several prongs. The white-tailed deer has reddish fur in the summer and grayish-brown in the winter. They are very common in wooded areas of the Red River Valley.



Beaver
Castor canadensis

Length

Head and body: 27-38 inches
Tail: 9-12 inches
Track: 6-6.5 inches



Features

The beaver has prominent, orange front teeth and a paddle-like, scaly tail. They gnaw down trees, leaving cone-shaped stumps to build dams. Originally numerous along the Red River, beavers were hunted for their pelts and became scarce; however, their numbers have increased in recent years.

Northern flying squirrels

Glaucomys sabrinus

Length

Head and body: 5.5-6 inches

Tail: 3.5-5 inches

Track: 1.5 inches

Features

Grayish-brown on back and white below, flying squirrels also have folds of skin between their front and back legs.

Although they cannot truly fly, the animals do glide downward by leaping 20-30 feet, spreading and moving their legs, and using their tail as a rudder to control the glide. Their wide flaps of skin along their sides help to slow their descent.



Least chipmunk

Eutamias minimus

Length

Head and body: 3.5-4.5 inches

Tail: 3-4.5 inches

Features

The small, slim body of the least chipmunk has stripes on its head, sides and back. The back stripes extend to the base of the tail. Feeding sites are marked by piles of fruit pulp and nut trimmings. The animal hibernates underground in the winter.



Eastern chipmunk

Tamias striatus

Length

Head and body: 5.5-6.5 inches

Tail: 3-4.5 inches

Features

The eastern chipmunk has stripes on its head, sides and back, but the back stripes extend only to the rump. They have extensive burrows up to 12 feet long with a storage chamber, sleeping room, dump, latrine and several concealed entrances. They partially hibernate in the winter.



Eastern gray squirrel

Sciurus carolinensis

Length

Head and body 8-11 inches

Tail: 8-10 inches

Track: 2.25 inches

Features

The gray squirrel has a whitish below, gray on their back and sides and a large, bushy tail. Active all year, the gray squirrel relies on buried food in the winter. They breed twice a year, accompanied by fights, chases and other noisy activities.



Red squirrels

Tamiasciurus hudsonicus

Length

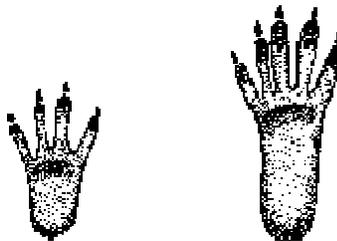
Head and body: 7.5-8.5 inches

Tail: 4-6 inches

Track: .87 inches

Features

The red squirrel has a rusty above and whitish below. They are smaller than the gray squirrel and have a less bushy tail. The animals are noisy and announce intruders with harsh, strident calls.



Snowshoe hare

Lepus americanus



Length

Head and body: 15-18.5 inches

Tail: 2 inches

Features

Large hind feet characterize the snowshoe hare. Its coat changes twice a year and has a color of dark brown except in the winter when it is white. Beginning in September, the brown summer coat is gradually replaced by white-tipped hairs over three months; the reverse process begins in March. In autumn, the animal develops dense fur pads on its feet.



Eastern cottontail

Sylvilagus floridanus

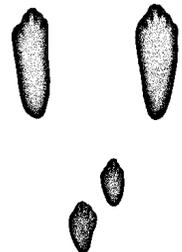
Length

Head and body: 13-16 inches

Tail: 2 inches

Features

The short-tailed eastern cottontail has a conspicuous white tail when running. The numbers of this species have greatly increased since settlement of the Valley.



Carnivores

flesh-eating animal



Lynx

Lynx canadensis

Length

Head and body: 30-38 inches

Tail: 4 inches

Track: 7 inches

Features

The lynx has a short, black-tipped tail, scattered spots, furry ruff, tufted ears and fur varied in color but usually grayish tan. The lynx is an agile climber, swims well and travels easily among fallen timbers. Found in the Valley among pre-settlement times, the animal now mostly inhabits coniferous forests north of the Valley.



Bobcat

Lynx rufus

Length

Head and body: 26-36 inches

Tail: 5 inches

Track: 1.75 inches

Features

The tail of the bobcat is short and black on top only. Its fur varies from dark to light and is spotted on the belly. The bobcat is the most common wild feline in North America and adapts well to the presence of man.



Mink

Mustela vison

Length

Head and body: 11.5-20 inches

Tail: 5-9 inches

Track: 1.75 inches

Features

The long, slim body of the mink has dark red-brown fur except for a small, pale area on the chin and scattered white spots underneath. Mink are excellent swimmers, but they prey on both aquatic and terrestrial animals. They are fierce fighters that scream, spit, hiss and emit pungent odor when provoked. Mink used to be quite common along the Red.



Marten

Martes americana

Length

Head and body: 13.5-20 inches

Tail: 6.5-9.5 inches

Track: 1.6 inches

Features

The marten has a slender body, a buffy patch on the throat and breast and a long, brush tail. The tail and underparts are darker than the back. This forest species is usually a night-time hunter, but they are occasionally seen during the day. They are now restricted to the continuous forest north of the Red River Valley.



Omnivores

flesh and plant-eating animal



Arctic shrew

Sorex arcticus

Feature

The arctic shrew is rich brown on top, paler on the sides and white below. They are found in forested areas of the Red River Valley.



Northern water shrew

Sorex palustris

Length

Head and body: 1.75-2.5 inches

Tail: 1-2 inches

Features

The northern water shrew has fierce energy. Each day the grayish-brown animal eats more than its weight in insects, mollusks, earthworms, etc.



Short-tailed shrew

Blarina brevicauda

Length

Head and body: 3-4 inches

Tail: .75-1 inch

Features

The short-tailed shrew has a dark, metallic-gray color and a short tail. Its venomous saliva aids in subduing mice and other mammals.



Pygmy shrew
Microsorex hoyi

Length

Head and body: 2.5-3.5 centimeters
Tail: 2.5-3.5 centimeters

Features

The pygmy shrew is the smallest mammal in North America and the second smallest in the world. At a weight of 2.2 grams, the pygmy shrew weighs less than a dime. It looks like a tiny mouse with a long snout, and is soft brown to gray on its back and gray or silver on its belly.



Fisher
Martes pennanti

Length

Track: 5 inches

Features

The fisher is a large, all-dark relative of the marten. Common in the Valley in pre-settlement times, fisher are now only found in forests to the north.



River otter
Lutra canadensis

Length

Head and body: 20-35 inches
Tail: 10-18.5 inches
Track: 3.5 inches



Features

The weasel-like shape of the otter is accompanied by dark brown fur often with golden gloss on its head and shoulders. Its tail is thick, furry and tapers toward the tip. Otters are sociable animals that wrestle, play tag, slide down muddy or snowy riverbanks and roll in grasses and reeds. Their sounds include chirps, whistles, growls and screams.



Striped skunk
Mephitis mephitis

Length

Head and body: 15-19 inches
Tail: 7-10 inches
Hind track: 1.5 inches



Features

The striped skunk has a white facial stripe, neck patch and "V" on the back mottled, bushy tail. When provoked, it ejects a fine spray of acrid fluid from anal glands. The striped skunk hibernates in the winter and is abundant along brushy stream borders and woody thickets.



Raccoon
Procyon lotor

Length

Head and body: 16-26 inches
Tail: 8-12 inches
Hind track: 3.87 inches

Features

Raccoons have a dark-eye mask and a bushy, ringed tail. They are very common along the Red River. Raccoons co-exist well with humans and will eat nearly any kind of plant or animal food including garbage.



Black bear
Ursus americanus



Size

Head and body length:
4.5-5 feet
Shoulder height: 2-3 feet
Track length: 7 inches



Features

Fur on a black bear varies in color from cinnamon to black. They all have a brown snout and no shoulder hump. They were plentiful in gallery forests of the Red River Valley in pre-settlement times. Black bear prefer to live in timber areas under cover of thickets, swamps and dense forests for protection.

For more information, contact:

River Keepers
325 7th Street South, Ste. 201
Fargo, ND 58103
(701) 235-2895
riverkeepers@i29.net