

Ermine (*Mustela erminea*)



Taxonomy:

Family Mustelidae. Also called short-tailed weasel or stoat. There are nineteen North American subspecies, including *Mustela erminea muricus* from the region.

Description:

Long, slender body and neck with short legs, a small head, and rounded ears. Relatively short, fluffy tail with a black tip. Summer fur is brown above and white below, turning pure white during the winter. Distinguished from *Mustela frenata* by its smaller size and shorter tail.

Total length: 190-343 mm; Tail: 42-90 mm; Weight: 25-116 g. Males are substantially larger than females.



Distribution:

Alaska and Canada, including many Arctic islands, northeastern and northwestern US and south through the intermountain west. Common at higher elevations throughout Utah.

Ecology and diet:

Carnivore generalists, ermines prey on a wide variety of small vertebrates. Although they are primarily nocturnal they are also active during daylight. Dens are made in hollow logs, rock piles, or burrows where they nest and cache food. They are good swimmers and can also climb trees to forage in bird nests.

Life History:

Mating occurs in mid-summer when several ova are fertilized but cease to develop until the following March. Following implantation, females bear a single litter of about 4-9 offspring in April or May after a gestation period of about 27 days. Age at sexual maturity is about 3-4 months for females. Maximum lifespan is 6-7 years.

References: King 1983; Zeweloff 1988