

## Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*)



### **Taxonomy:**

Family: Cricetidae. Sixteen subspecies are recognized, including the regional form *Ondatra zibethicus osoyoosensis*.

### **Description:**

Most similar to the beaver, from which it is distinguished by its smaller size and relatively long slender tail.

Total length: 410-620 mm; Tail: 180-295; Hind foot: 70-82 mm; Weight: 0.7–1.8 kg.



### **Distribution:**

Alaska and most of Canada excluding the high arctic, south through most of the US except portions of the southwest and southeast. Locally common in watersheds along the Wasatch Front at low to mid elevations.

### **Ecology and diet:**

Muskrats are semi-aquatic, occurring in a wide variety of habitats including streams, ponds, and marshes. Although they don't construct dams, they do build conspicuous lodges and swimming channels in marshes or tunnels and underground dens along streams. They are active year-round and are generally nocturnal but occasionally are

seen during daylight. Muskrats feed on leaves, stems and tubers of a wide variety of aquatic plants, but also eat fish, crayfish, snails, and other aquatic animals.

### **Life History:**

Reproduction occurs during the spring and summer. Litters of 4 to 8 young are born after a gestation of about 1 month. Under favorable conditions, females may produce as many as 4 litters per year. Young are weaned at about 1 month, and generally become sexually mature the spring following their birth. Life span is 3 to 4 years.

**References:** Willner et al. 1980; Feldhamer 1999.