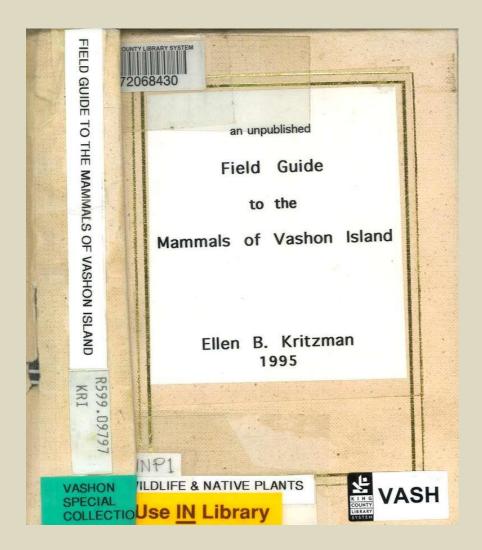


Field Guide to the Mammals of Vashon Island

By: Ellen B. Kritzman





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NOTE: The colors in some photos are not true—color descriptions should be considered more reliable.



Trowbridge shrew, Sorex trowbridgii

Size: Medium in shrew terms, or 4-5 in. total length.

Color: Sooty grayish above and below, with a distictly bicolored tail (dark on top; lighter underneath).

Distinctive characters: Coloration as well as the typical sharply pointed shrew snout.

Habitat: Forest floor litter, especially evergreen woodlands. Habits: As with other shrews exhibits a high level of feeding activity necessary to stoke its rapid metabolism. Feeds primarily on soft-bodied insects and insect pupae but also some seeds, especially Douglas fir. In general, shrews are frequent cat victims but seldom eaten, probably owing to flank gland substances found repellent. Island status: Only one specimen of record (Slater Museum).







Vagrant shrew, Sorex vagrans

Size: Small, about 4 in. long, weighing 1/4 oz.

Color: Brown (summer) to grayish brown (winter) above, a

lighter shade below, with an indistinctly bicolored tail. Distinctive characters: Size, color and pointy shrew snout.

Habitat: Various, but partial to mixed forest and brush.

Habits: A vulnerable surface forager using its good olfactory sense and sensitive vibrissae (whiskers) to find prey -mostly arthropods. Hunts almost continually, consuming its own weight every 24 hours.

Island status: Common.





Shrew-mole, Neurotrichus gibbsii

Size: Medium shrew size, about 4-5 in.

Color: Sooty-black.

Distinctive characters: A short, fat, scaly but hairy tail. Its broad forepaws demonstrate that this species belongs to the mole family rather than the shrew. [A Northwest original; the most closely related genus lives in Asia]

Habitat: Forests and brushy areas, especially dense and moist.

Habits: Forages day and night in subsurface litter, using its sensitive snout and keen hearing to find worms, insects and spiders.

Island status: Not reported yet but keep an eye out!







Coast mole, Scapanus orarius

Size: A small mole, 6-7 in. long.

Color: Velvety black or blackish brown.

Distinctive characters: Classic mole characteristics: snout, no visible eyes, neck as wide as head and body, short, almost hairless tail, shovel-like forepaws with strong claws.

Habitat: From pastures and lawns to mixed or deciduous woods. Habits: Leads a completely subterranean life, pushing burrow soil out into small mole hills. Feeds mainly on earthworms (whose vibrational movements it can hear), plus some other invertebrates and plant material.

Island status: Common.





Little brown bat, Myotis lucifugus

Size: Approximately 3 1/2 in. long.

Color: Slightly yellowish brown above; lighter underneath.

Distinctive characters: Relatively large feet (9-11 mm.) and short ears, especially compared to other myotid bats.

Habitat: Prefers, but is not limited to, the vicinity of water.

May be found in buildings, especially the summer nursery colonies.

Habits: Feeds after dark on low-flying aquatic insects, including mosquitos, which are found by echolocation. May fly off-Island to find winter hibernation sites (?).

Island status: Probably not uncommon.



Big brown bat, Eptesicus fuscus

Size: A medium Northwest bat 4-5 in. long.

Color: Long. glossy, bright brown fur.

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Ears short; wing membranes, feet, ears and nose blackish.

Habitat: From city parks to forests. Also found in buildings, especially the hibernating or maternity colonies.

Habits: A fast flyer, most active right after sunset, feeding primarily on beetles. Before hibernation this bat boosts its weight by one third with winter fat reserves.

Island status: Not determined.







Aplodontia rufa beaver, Mountain

Size: About 14 in., all head and body.

Color: Brown

Distinctive characters: No visible tail, long front claws, long whiskers, small eyes, little round ears (for those who know pocket gophers this animal ressembles a giant one). Habitat: Moist underbrush, berrybush jungles, forest tree roots. Habits: Primarily nocturnal. Lives in shallow burrow systems with 6 in. entrance holes. Its strictly vegetarian diet includes foods poisonous or inedible to others: nettles, rhododendron, bracken fern, devils's club, skunk cabbage. Island status: One possible burrow but no specimens reported yet of this unique Northwest species. [No close relatives anywhere; the most primitive living rodent]







Townsend chipmunk, Tamias (Eutamias) townsendii

Size: About 10 in. total length.

Color: Dark brown with darker and lighter stripes on the

Distinctive characters: Relatively dull stripes; bushy tail edged with white-tipped hairs. Habitat: Woods and brushy areas.

Habits: A good climber but usually lives in burrows. Is active during the day, but remains underground in winter. Mainly a seed and fruit eater, its diet does vary with season: summer - berries, fall - maple and conifer seeds (some cached), winter - subterranean fungi, spring - insects. sland status: Not uncommon.

15





Eastern gray squirrel, Sciurus carolinensis

Size: Our largest squirrel -- about 18 in. (almost half tail).

Color: Gray with a rusty wash above; whitish underneath.

Distinctive characters: Coloration and size.

Habitat: Deciduous or mixed woods.

Habits: Makes leaf nests in tree limb crotches or uses woodpecker holes. Abroad days all year. Favorite foods are nuts and seeds, including what you put in bird feeders.

Island status: Introduced to Seattle years ago, it appears to have reached Vashon fairly recently -- numbers and locations not known.







Douglas squirrel, Tamiasciurus douglasii

Size: Less than 15 in.

Color: Back brown with dusky olive overtones, separated by a dark line from its bright orangey-rust belly.

Distinctive characters: The color of its underside and a loud scolding voice.

Habitat: Coniferous and mixed woodlands.

Habits: Feeds mainly on the seeds of Douglas fir (a mound of cone scales and cores on the ground indicates a feeding station above), supplemented with conifer shoots, fruits, fungi, etc. Usually winters in tree holes, summers in nests of tree materials, mosses, lichens. Diurnal.

Island status: Not uncommon.



Northern flying squirrel, Glaucomys sabrinus

Size: About a foot long.

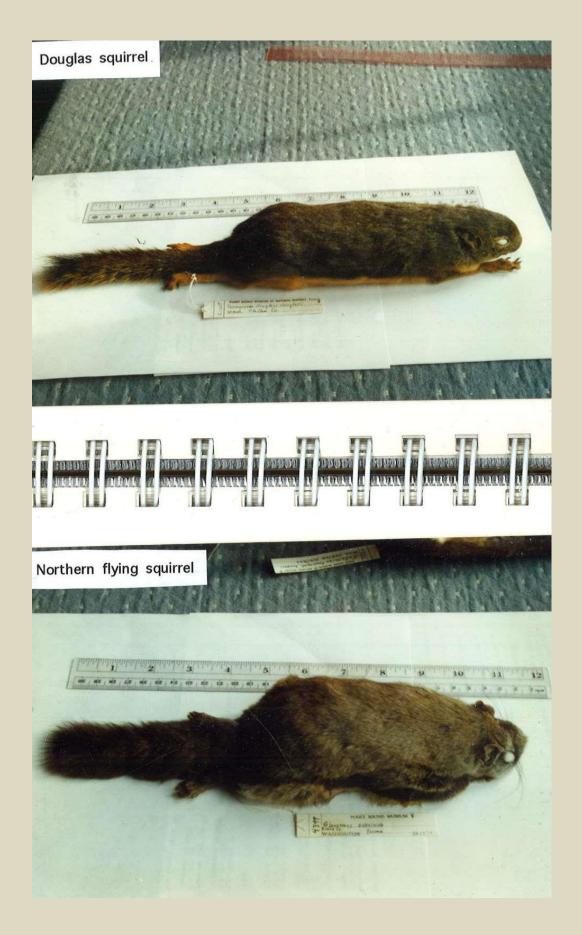
Color: Gray-brown above, creamy white underneath (not on the tail).

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Large eyes, soft fur, flat tail, folds of furred skin between front and hind legs.

Habitat: Coniferous and mixed woodlands.

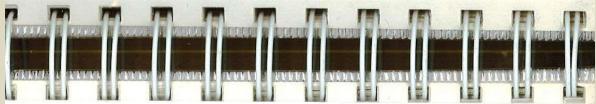
Habits: Lives in tree dens (often old woodpecker holes) lined with shredded bark. Glides from tree to tree at night foraging for fungi (summer) and lichens (winter). Also eats nuts, seeds -- including your bird food --, fruits, and a variety of insects.

Island status: Seldom seen but probably not uncommon.









Beaver, Castor canadensis

Size: The largest of N. American rodents, about 4 ft. long, weighing up to 40 or 50 lb.

Color: Brown.

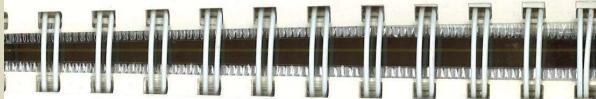
<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Large, flat, scaly, paddle-like tail and webbed hind feet.

<u>Habitat:</u> Ponds or streams.

<u>Habits:</u> Lives in family groups (mother, father and kits up to 2 years) either in bank burrows or open water lodges. Feeds mainly on woody plants such as aspen, birch, cottonwood, alder and willow, leaving stumps gnawed from all sides to a central point. Primarily active evenings and nights.

Island status: Apparently introduced to Judd Creek off 216th in 1993; also seen at Raabs Lagoon.





Deer mouse, Peromyscus maniculatus

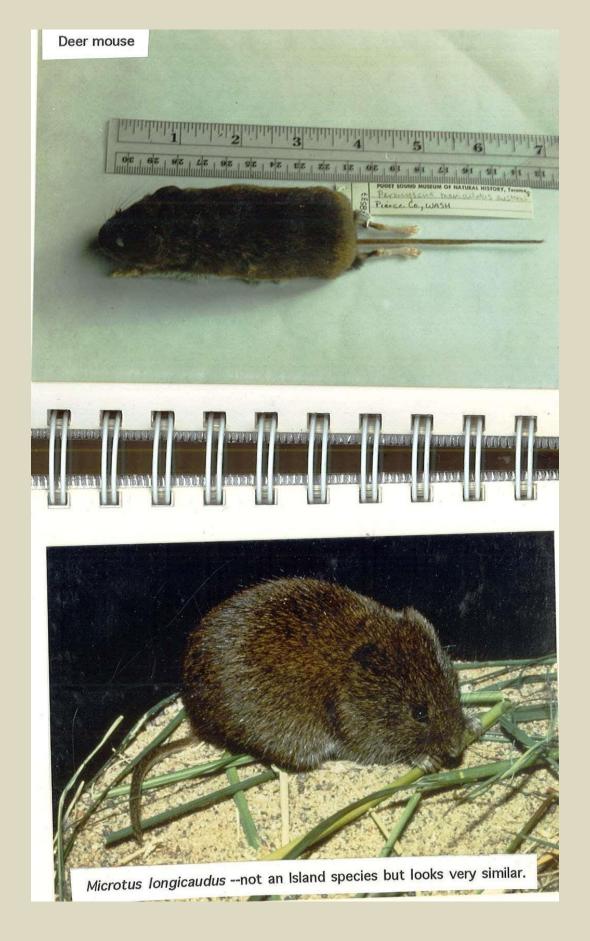
<u>Size:</u> 6-8 in., of which the tail is somewhat less than half. <u>Color:</u> Grayish brown above (gray in juveniles), white on the underbelly and underside of tail.

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Large ears, fairly large eyes, and a pointy nose compared to voles.

Habitat: All types, including houses and outbuildings.

Habits: Equally at home under rocks or logs, in ground burrows in garage stored furniture, in livestock grain supplies. Is almost omnivorous and quite prolific, bearing 3-4 litters of 3-6 young each per year. Usually active after dusk.

Island status: Common.







Creeping vole, Microtus oregoni

Size: Usually 5-51/2 in. with a short tail (under 30% of total) but Vashon specimens are 51/2-6 in. and more robust.

Color: Dark gray-brown back, dusky gray underside.

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Tail very short, hindlimbs relatively delicate, ears short and barely visible.

Habitat: Forests and their periphery of herbaceous edges, upland slopes, brushy areas and clearcuts, damp or dry.

<u>Habits:</u> Somewhat fossorial, digging subsurface tunnels. Eats mainly grasses and forbs, supplemented with berries, bulbs and roots, subterranean fungi. Makes nests of dried grass underground or in logs.

Island status: Much rarer than the Townsend vole; half a dozen or fewer specimens in museums.





Townsend vole, Microtus townsendii

Size: Our largest vole, 61/2-9 in., with a medium long tail (in vole terms).

Color: Dark brown above, dark gray below, indistinctly bicolored tail.

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Blunt nose and small eyes of all voles but here combined with large size and round furred ears that are clearly visible.

Habitat: Thick moist grasslands that are not cut too short.
 Habits: Makes trails through the vegetation, often leaving piles of grass cuttings in these runways. Grass is used for nests; the stems and leaves of forbs are food.

Island status: Common in its preferred habitat but subject to cyclic population fluctuations like most voles.





Southern red-backed vole, Clethrionomys gapperi

Size: About 6 in. overall with a tail that is half the length (or less) than its head and body.

Color: Dark brown with a broad, but not distinct, reddish band down the back, dusky sides and a light underbelly.

Distinctive characters: Classic vole characters -- blunt nose, small eyes and ears, short tail -- plus the reddish color.

Habitat: Prefers dense coniferous woods with rotting logs.

Habits: Climbs well but nests under logs, tree roots and litter. Primary food is green plant material and fungi, although a variety of other items are consumed. Active day and night and all seasons.

Island status: Only one (1994) specimen of record.









Muskrat, Ondatra zibethicus

Size: Giant vole size, about 20-24".

Color: Both underfur and overlying guard hairs dark brown.

Distinctive characters: Tapering scaly tail flattened from side to side, hind feet much larger than forefeet, fringed with hair and partially webbed. A commercially desirable fur. Habitat: Lowland fresh waters and salt marshes.

Habits: Lives in bank burrows, or builds lodges of soft aquatic plants (not woody like beavers) and sometimes feeding ing platforms. Eats primarily aquatic vegetation, adding protein from mussels, amphibians, etc. Active mainly at dusk or in darkness to avoid its enemies; man and mink. Named for a pair of abdominal scent glands.

Island status: Seen at Judd Creek, Portage Marsh. No specimens.







Black (Roof) rat, Rattus rattus

Size: About 16 in. long, with tail length greater than head and body measurement.

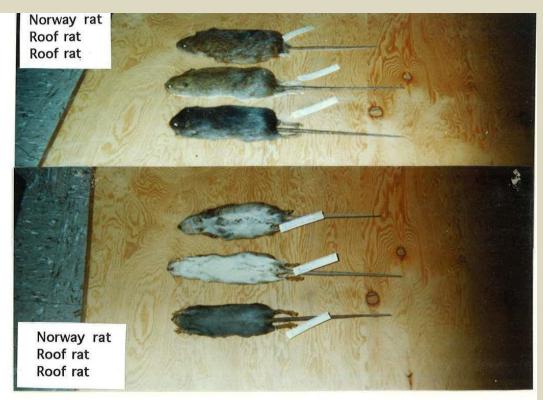
<u>Color:</u> Black above and sooty below *or* brown above and white or yellowish below -- littermates may be both forms.

Distinctive characters: Ears (large) and tail (scaly) not furred.

Habitat: In buildings, outbuildings, and associated natural settings, but limited to coastal areas of the U.S. where it continues to be introduced via ships.

<u>Habits:</u> Also omnivorous though it prefers grain. What is not eaten is contaminated by its fecal pellets and urine. Inhabits upper stories more readily than the Norway rat, otherwise habits are similar.

<u>Island status:</u> Common -- possibly more so than the Norway rat which is considered the more aggressive competitor.





Norway rat, Rattus norvegicus

Size: Also about 16 in. long, but the tail is equal to less than the head and body length.

Color: Brown to rusty-gray on the back; dirty white below.

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Prominent ears; a nearly naked, scaly tail that is shorter than that of the Black rat.

Habitat: Introduced from the Old World; now found in most urban areas and in farm settings, especially in cellars, outbuildings and cultivated fields.

Habits: Exactly what you would expect of rats. Omnivorous, with a fondness for poultry and their eggs. May dig subsurface tunnels. Extremely prolific -- average number of young per female per year is 45. Mainly nocturnal.

Island status: Less common, I believe, than the Black rat.





Dall's porpoise, Phocoenoides dalli

Size: 3-4 ft. (newborn) to just over 61/2 ft. (adult).

Color: Black,with large white belly and flank patch, plus white dorsal fin tip and outer edge of the tail flukes.

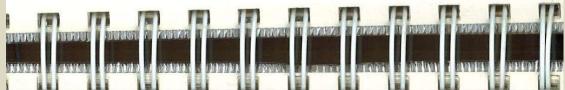
Distinctive characters: Color pattern (described as looking like a herd of baby Orcas), stocky build, small flippers and dorsal fin, the latter pointing up or slightly forward.

Habitat: Once considered pelagic but since the mid-70's have moved into inland waters, including the southern Sound.

Habits: Groups usually number 2-15. May ride bow waves and splash. Feed primarily on squid and small schooling fish, thus are vulnerable to entanglement in drift nets. Breed here, bearing calves a year later in the summer.

Island status: Sighted frequently year round.





Orca (Killer whale), Orcinus orca

Size: 8 ft. at birth to about 28 ft. (male) or 20 ft. (female).

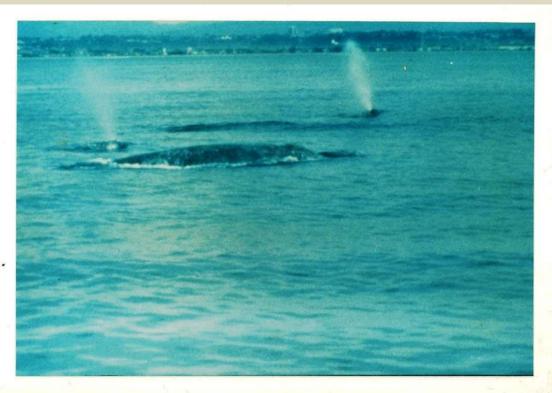
Color: Black with white markings: oval patch behind eye, large area along underside, throat and jaw, part of flanks. A whitish-gray saddle patch lies behind the dorsal fin.

Distinctive characters: Size, markings, paddle-like flippers, a large dorsal fin (male: 4-6 ft.; female: up to 3 ft., curved)

Habitat: All Puget Sound, congregating around spring-summer salmon runs from eastern Straits to Fraser River mouth.

Habits: Form resident maternal pods (ours is J pod, 22 whales) or transient groups of 1-5. Pods differ in dialects and feeding specialization -- J feeds on salmon, some others take seals, sea lions, cetaceans, turtles, sea birds, etc. First calving at about age 15, then at 8-year intervals.

Island status: Not uncommon Sept.-Feb., traveling at 4 mph and doing 100 mi. in 24 hrs. Best viewing off Pt. Robinson.





Gray whale, Eschrichtius robustus

Size: 16 ft. at birth to about 45 ft. maximum.

Color: Mottled gray, sometimes with light patches.

Distinctive characters: Color, adhering barnacles and whale lice, 6-12 knobs instead of a dorsal fin, mouth lined with short plates of white baleen rather than teeth.

Habitat: Nearshore waters; shallow bays with muddy bottoms.

Habits: Filter feed from bottom sediments for worms, small fish, crab larvae, possibly seaweed, but especially ghost shrimp. Clouded muddy water may pinpoint feeding areas especially from the air. A few seem resident, but most winter, breed, and then calve 12 months later in lagoons off Baja Calif., and summer 7,000 mi. north, off Alaska.

Island status: Not uncommon in Feb.-March, during migration.

OTHER CETACEANS (Whales, porpoises, dolphins) TO LOOK FOR:

Harbor porpoise, Phocoena phocoena

About 6 ft. at maturity (4 yrs.), with small triangular dorsal fin pointing slightly backwards. Dark back; white belly. Travel alone or in small groups; shy, avoid boats, don't splash. Feed on squid, shrimp, small fish. Spring to summer calving. Common till the 40's, now rare but reportedly seen off Vashon.

Humpback whale, Megaptera novaeangliae Up to 52 ft., a dark slate gray or black above with variable amounts of white underneath.

A tiny dorsal fin but very long, flexible pectoral fins, knobbed on the leading edges. Knobs are also seen on top of the head and upper part of the lower jaw. Long ventral throat pleats accomodate long, dark, baleen plates in the mouth. Once common in Greater Puget Sound waters, the Humpback is now seen only rarely during its spring/summer migration.



Minke whale, Balaenoptera acutorostrata

Usually less than 30 ft. long, with a head sharply pointed at the tip and a prominent, curved (backward) dorsal fin set very far back on the body.

The back is a dark gray or brown with paler gray patches along the sides.

Usually solitary (unlike the Orcas of similar size), the Minke is a filter-feeding baleen whale, but also likes herring. One seen off Colvos in 1994.

False Killer whale, *Pseudorca crassidens*Grows to a maximum of 16 ft. (female) or 20 ft. (male).
Color is a glossy black with a dark gray underside patch.
Distinguished by a lack of white, and dorsal fins that curve towards the rear but only half as high as a female Orca's.
Usually oceanic but seen off the North End dock, summer 1992.







Red fox, Vulpes fulva (vulpes)

Size: 3-31/2 ft. long.

Color: Rusty to yellowish red above and white below, with backs of ears, fronts of legs and feet blackish. Silver, black and cross (darker than red) phases can occur.

Distinctive characters: Thick, bushy, white-tipped tail.

Habitat: Prefers semi-open terrain with rocky areas, slopes or banks for denning.

Habits: Usually shy and nocturnal or crepuscular. Staple of its diet is mice, but it also feeds on other rodents, rabbits, birds, frogs, insects and fruits. Breeds in Jan./Feb. and bears 4 or 5 kits 71/2 weeks later. The kits are cared for by both parents and stay a family till summer's end.

Island status: Uncommon but sightings by reputable observers.



Coyote, Canis latrans

Size: Slightly smaller than a German shepherd. 10-18 kg

Color: Gray

Distinctive characters: Runs with tail down.

Habitat: Open areas, woodlands, forests, urban areas

<u>Habits:</u> Mostly in pairs sometimes in packs. Our coyotes are mostly nocturnal and seen at dawn or dusk.

Island Status: First record 2005 road-killed coyote on side of road near St. John Vianney's. Multiple sightings and howls heard from 2011 on. This photo was taken near Camp Sealth November 11, 2011.





Black bear, Ursus americanus

Size: About 5 ft. in length, 3-31/2 ft. high at the shoulder.

Color: Black or brown to cinnamon.

Distinctive characters: Lacks the grizzly bear shoulder hump. Claws are black and medium long (2-21/2 in.).

Habitat: Wooded areas, but often in the clearings, clearcuts and upland slope edges. Also backyard compost piles, garbage cans and dumps.

Habits: Omnivorous diet of varied plant items, insects, small vertebrates. Usually puts on fat and goes into winter dormancy in a hollow tree, log or cave, bearing two cubs in the den. Sees poorly but smells, hears and climbs well.

Island status: ? One individual removed in 1993; one resident may still be with us.





Raccoon, Procyon lotor

Size: 2-3 ft. long, about a third of that tail.

Color: Grizzled (gray-brown hairs tipped with black) with black face mask and 4-6 black tail rings.

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Color pattern and overall shape -- longer hind feet raise the rear end above the front.

Habitat: Anywhere there is tree or brush cover nearby.

Habits: Omnivorous, but with a special appetite for aquatic

Habits: Omnivorous, but with a special appetite for additional life, soft fruits, nesting birds and eggs, pet food. Very dexterous, good at swimming and climbing. Keen eyesight and survival ability. Average litter of four is born in a hollow tree, log, culvert, etc. in winter or early spring.

Island status: Very common.





Mink, Mustela vison

Size: About 2 ft. long but weighs only 2-3 lb. Males are considerably larger than females.

Color: Rich chocolate or blackish brown. May have white

spotting on chin and throat.

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Tail fairly long and somewhat bushy.

Body slender, neck longer but legs shorter than a cat's.

Habitat: Frequently but not exclusively by fresh or salt water.

Habits: Preferentially semi-aquatic. More active nights than days. Ferocious and equipped with powerful anal scent

glands. Eats waterfowl and eggs, snakes, fish, frogs and rodents but substitutes chickens for muskrats on Vashon.

Island status: Not common; those we have may be descendants of an early Island mink ranching operation.





River otter, Lutra canadensis

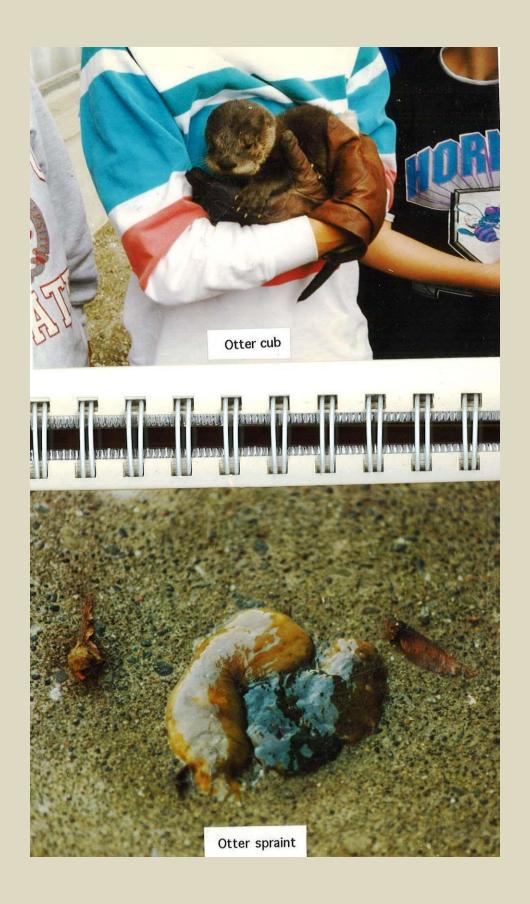
Size: About 4 ft. in length with males larger than females.

Color: Dark brown above; lighter below. Throat may be silvery.

Distinctive characters: Body cylindrical, but tail tapering
from a thick base to a pointed tip. Ears are small. The blunt nose has prominent whiskers. All feet are webbed.

Habitat: Fresh and salt water; the land routes in between.

Habits: Feeds on aquatic vertebrates and invertebrates but especially fish. Signs of otter presence include tracks, "spraint" (feces or scat), trails, flattened grassy areas used for drying off, and bank slides. It is known as a fun-loving, sociable animal. It may den in bank burrows and raises 2-4 cubs a year.







Harbor seal, Phoca vitulina

Size: Up to 6 ft. and 200 lb. for both sexes.

Color: Various background colors (cream to tan; silver to black) overlaid by a varying amount of whitish to blackish spots.

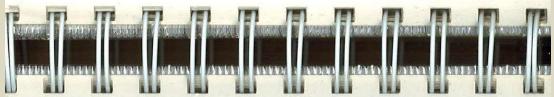
<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Short flippers -- the rear ones always extended behind, tubby body, blunt snout, no external ears.

Habitat: Nearshore waters and low rock, sandspit, mudflat or cobble beach shores for hauling out.

Habits: May be seen singly or in groups, especially on a low tide haul out. Locomote awkwardly on land. Feed on fish, including salmon in gill nets. Bear single pups July-Sept. at the pupping areas (like Gertrude Is.) in lower Puget Sound, and re-mate a month later.

Island status: Quite common, and increasing the last 20 years.





California sea lion, Zalophus californianus

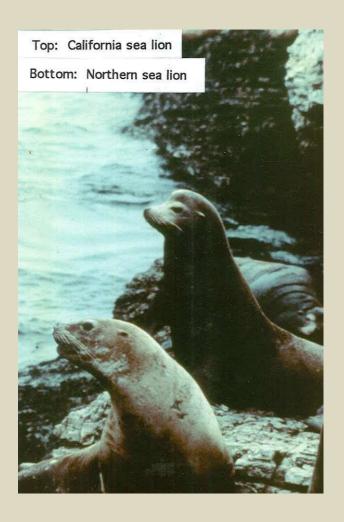
Size: Males up to 8 ft., 600 lb.; females up to 6 ft., 200 lb.

Color: Usually dark brown (may look black when wet).

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Long hairless front and hind flippers, small external ears, snout pointier than in seals, a high forehead crest in males.

Habitat: Water adjacent to rocky beaches, buoys, rafts, docks.
 Habits: The acrobatic "seal" of circuses, able to bring its hind flippers forward. Agile on land or in the water where it can "porpoise" up to 20 mph, dive deeply and stay 20 min. Barks loudly and frequently. Despite notoriety of salmon predation at Ballard Locks, sea lions prefer herring and hake. Breeding grounds are southern to Baja California.

Island status: Males commonly seen (and heard) in Puget Sound, especially in fall and winter; not in July-August.



Northern (Steller) sea lion, Eumetopias jubata Males up to 10 ft. and 2200 lb., females 7 ft. and 600 lb. Coat color a light yellow brown to dark brown.

Distinguished from the California sea lion by color and size, a broader head, and an occasional low roar rather than a noisy, persistent bark.

Mostly an outer coast animal but seen once in a while on midchannel buoys off Vashon (Ellisport, Pt.Robinson, and Pt. Defiance).

Northern elephant seal, Mirounga angustirostris
Males up to 20 ft., 8,000 lb.; females up to 11 ft., 2,000 lb.
Grayish or brownish skin, often ragged looking; no spots.
Males have an abbreviated trunk; females have a normal snout, but pointier than that of harbor seals.

Deep divers fond of dogfish shark. Single males and young of the year may be seen in the fall, especially Sept., head up in deep waters -- the "deadhead" position.





Black-tailed deer, Odocoileus hemionus

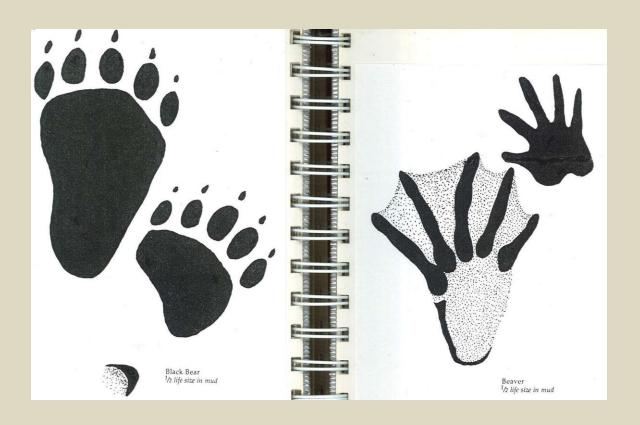
<u>Size:</u> 3-31/2 ft. high at the shoulder; bucks larger than does.

<u>Color:</u> Back reddish or yellowish brown in summer; grayish in winter. Tail white underneath. Fawns spotted (31/2 mos.).

<u>Distinctive characters:</u> Large ears, tail coloration, antlers that fork by two equal branches (dichotomously).

Habitat: Forest edges and dense brush but happily visit open orchard and garden areas, as well as marshy sites.

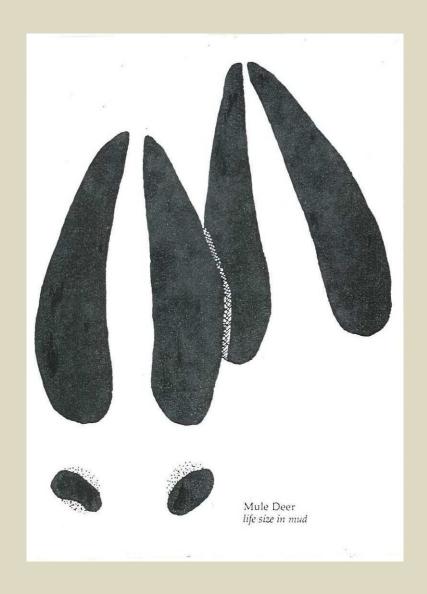
Habits: Bucks grow antlers yearly, shedding them after the fall competition for harems of does. Once-bred does bear single fawns; then twins. Small family or bachelor groups move together. Deer run with a bounding gait that clears high fences. Shrubs (roses included), berries and soft vegetation is browse in summer; woodier material in winter. Island status: Common.











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