

# North American Porcupine

**Scientific Name:** *Erethizon dorsatum*

**Class:** Mammalia

**Order:** Rodentia

**Family:** Erethizontidae



The porcupine averages 3.5 feet in length, including a 6-inch tail, and can weigh up to 40 lbs. The upper body is covered with sharp quills nestled among long, thick fur ranging down the tail. The underside is covered with long, dark fur. The feet have a naked sole, and 4 toes on the front feet, and 5 toes on the hind feet.

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## Range

Alaska, Canada, U.S.A. except southeast quarter, extreme north of Mexico

## Habitat

Timbered and wooded areas

## Gestation

7 months

## Litter

Usually 1

## Behavior

They are mainly nocturnal and, while foraging, continually sniff the air. They do not hibernate in the winter, but will remain in the den during extreme cold or stormy weather. They are rarely known to attack, but will defend themselves, when attacked, by climbing or fleeing. If cornered, they use the quilled tail for defense. Contrary to popular belief, they do not shoot these quills, but back into the foe, causing the lightly-attached quills to detach themselves when entering the enemy's skin. They crave salt, and often gnaw at machinery, gloves, boots, saddles and bottles which have been touched by sweaty hands. Their predators are the wolverine, puma, and fisher-marten. Other carnivores will attack porcupines only as a last resort.

## Reproduction

Mating occurs in the fall or early winter. The courtship consists of extensive vocalizing and a kind of dance. The young are born from April to June.

## Wild Diet

Bark, evergreens, herbaceous plants, flowers, leaves