

Animal Homes

By Dr. Leonard Lee Rue III

Animals, such as the bison and the caribou are migratory, traveling long distances between their summer range and their winter range. Some animals, such as the northern white-tailed deer, mule deer, moose and elk, don't really migrate; they shift 25 to 50 miles from a higher elevation to a lower, or from open areas to protected areas, in the winter and then go back in the spring. None of these animals actually have a home, but have a home range. They all have efficient coats of hair that keeps them warm and they will move to areas where they can be out of the bitter wind.

Some animals, such as the wolf, coyote and fox, have a home territory and dig earthen dens in which to raise their pups. Most of them don't use their dens after the pups are weaned, as they have very efficient coats of fur. Many will sleep, curled up, out in a snow storm and allow the snow to cover them over. The snow itself is a form of insulation and helps to keep them warm and protected from the wind.

Squirrels live in natural hollow trees or may use abandoned woodpecker holes. When the squirrel population is high, and there are not enough tree hollows, the squirrels will build bulky leaf nests high up in the crotch of a tree. Some squirrels live in man-made wood duck boxes and will chew the entrance holes in bird houses large enough so they can move in.

Most mice and rats build a nest of plant or man-made materials. The nest may be underground, in bird houses, wood piles, rock walls and also in human habitation. Mice will sometimes even move into a chest of drawers in a person's bedroom, when not disturbed. Mice, rats and squirrels that move into a person's home can cause a tremendous amount of damage.

Most of the ground squirrels dig underground burrows that they live in, year round. Many of the ground squirrels hibernate throughout the winter, passing the cold months in a deep sleep. Prairie dogs remain active all year long.

Raccoons and opossums usually den in hollow trees but they may, like the skunks, use an underground burrow, dug by the woodchuck. At times the woodchuck will hibernate in a side room, while these other animals sleep in the main den. They are not true hibernators, but do sleep lightly for extended periods of time. The woodchuck is a very important part of any ecosystem because so many other animals, and sometimes birds too, will seek shelter and safety in its burrow.

Bears sleep in caves and hollow trees if they can find them. More often, they have to dig a winter den of their own or just pile up heaps of vegetation and burrow down in the center of it, allowing everything to be covered by drifting snow.

Animals, such as the mink, weasel, otter, marten, fisher, etc. are such efficient predators that they have to move constantly, within their home range to prevent over-exploitation of their prey. Most of these animals travel on 7 to 9 day circles. Because of this, the animals have to have 7 to 9 dens in which to sleep, located at the end of each day's journey. Their dens may be in hollow trees, holes in the ground, in stone walls, rock crevasses or sometimes even in the dens and burrows of their prey species.

Muskrats and beaver may live in holes in the bank or they may build houses and lodges. The muskrat's house is usually made of compacted grasses and reeds. The beaver makes the most elaborate and substantial house of all. Usually each beaver house is a single family dwelling and is kept in constant repair and coated with a fresh layer of mud each autumn. The mud freezes in winter and provides good insulation and protection from its enemies.

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Abandoned	No longer used.
Adaptable	Able to make changes.
Alert	Very aware of surroundings.
Arctic	The region at the top of the earth.
Burrow	A home in the earth.
Bushel	A large measure for dry weight, about 32 quarts.
Cached	Food stored away for future use.
Colony	A group of the same kind of creature living together.
Crater	Large hole.
Dam	A structure, built to hold back water.
Den	A home in the earth or in a tree.
Deplete	Use up.
Domed	Rounded.
Draining	To let the water out.
Efficient	Works best.
Environment	Your surroundings.
Erosion	Washed or worn away.
Escape	Get away.
Excavate	To dig.
Famed	Well known.
Forthcoming	About to occur.
Fur	A softer covering than the hair that some animals have.
Grunt	A low, rough call.
Habitat	The area in which a creature lives.
Hibernators	Creatures that spend a part of the year in deep sleep and have reduced body functions.
Instinctive	An action that can be taken without thinking, learning or being taught..
Insulation	Material used to provide warmth.
Kinky	Wavy hair with bends in it.

Litter	When animals give birth to three or more young at one time. The grouping is called a litter.
Litter Mate	Animals born into the same group.
Living Chamber	The main portion of a den.
Marsh	A wet, grassy area.
Maze	A confusing trail.
Mound	A pile.
Natal Den	A den where the young are born.
Nursery	A protected place for the young.
Parasites	Organisms that live on or in another creature and upon which they feed.
Pester	To bother, annoy.
Plagued	Pestered, bothered.
Predator	A creature that eats another creature.
Prey	A creature that is eaten by another creature.
Reed	A tall coarse water plant.
Reluctant	Not wanting to do something.
Rock Crevasses	Holes made by splits or cracks in rocks.
Scattered	Thrown around.
Sought	Looked for.
Submerged	Beneath the water's surface.
Sufficient	Enough.
Surrounding	All around.
Swamps	A very wet and muddy area that has more plants growing there than ponds and lakes.
Talus	Small pieces of rock broken off a mountain.
Weaning	When a mother animal stops giving milk to her young.