

SMALL MAMMALS



At least 59 species of mammals live in Iowa. Perhaps you will see some of these small ones along the trail today.



Photo by Therese Cummiskey

EASTERN CHIPMUNK

Eastern chipmunks are small, ground-dwelling squirrels. Their cheek pouches extend down their necks and hold as much as two tablespoonfuls of nuts, seeds, insects, berries, fruit, buds, fungi, small frogs, worms, and bird eggs.

Their tunnel systems reach 30 feet in length, with several chambers for storing food, raising

babies, and depositing waste. If you see a hole on the trail that is about two inches in diameter, and has little to no dirt around it, you're probably looking at a chipmunk hole. They spend late fall to early spring in semi-hibernation.



GROUNDHOG

The groundhog, or woodchuck, is the largest ground squirrel in Iowa. It measures up to 26 inches long and 15 pounds. Groundhogs are diggers, with powerful limbs and thick claws. Burrows can be 50 feet long and five feet deep. Other small mammals use woodchuck burrows for dens and refuge. Woodchucks eat

mostly plants. They obtain moisture from rain and dew, rather than drinking. They are one of few true hibernating mammals.

VIRGINIA OPOSSUM

With its naked ears, long scaly tail, and silver-tipped fur, opossums appear rat-like; but they are related to kangaroos, being the only marsupial (pouched female) in the U.S. The female nurses her

young in her marsupium up to 3 months, then carries them on her back 1 to 2 months.

The opossum is the only American mammal with four fingers and an opposable thumb on its hind feet. This thumb helps grasp limbs but not small things such as seeds. The opossum's scaled tail grips like a monkey's tail for climbing and carrying.



Opossums eat mostly insects, snails, rodents, berries, over-ripe fruit, grasses, leaves, and carrion.

COTTONTAIL RABBIT

Rabbits here don't dig holes. They make "forms" — shallow depressions, usually under a dense thicket — and line them with fur and soft grass.

Cottontails eat a variety of plants including herbs, tree bark, and vegetables. The cottontail eats on all fours, and uses only its nose to move and adjust the position of its food. The cotton-



tail rabbit turns food with its nose to find the cleanest part to begin its meal.

Cottontails rarely feed on windy days, because wind interferes with their hearing, their primary defense mechanism.

RED FOX

Red foxes eat carrion, fruit, vegetables, game, and poultry... but mostly mice, which they can hear squeaking at 300 feet.

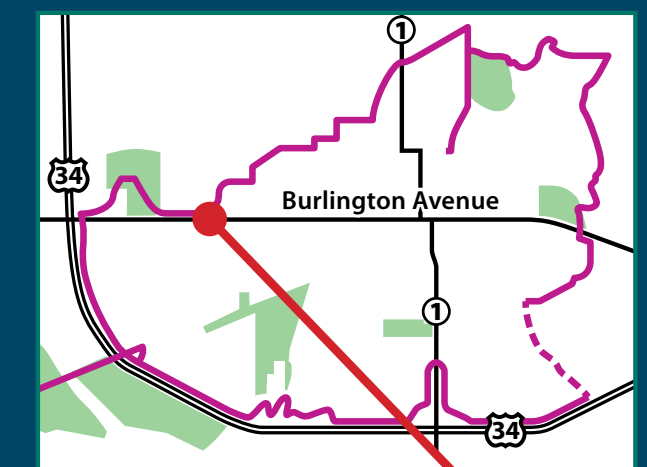
They are often together in pairs or small family groups. Outside the breeding season, most red foxes favor living in the open, in densely vegetated areas, though they



Photo by Michael Schwenter

may enter burrows to escape bad weather. Their burrows are often dug on hillsides or ravines, steep banks of water bodies, ditches, and neglected human environments.

FAIRFIELD LOOP TRAIL



YOU ARE
HERE

JEFFERSON
COUNTY
TRAILS
COUNCIL