

RACCOON

The raccoon is a highly adaptable animal and well able to survive close to man. There are probably more raccoons around now than there were when Captain John Smith arrived to explore the New World. The animal has been hunted extensively for its fur (coon skin hats) but its numbers never seem to have lessened.

Perhaps the secret to its success is the fact that it will eat all types of food: small rodents, frogs, fish (it can swim but not dive), fruits, nuts, bird's eggs, insects, and considers the campground garbage can a culinary delight.

The raccoon has very nimble "hands", better than ours in one way because it can pick up small objects very easily between the fingers rather than between the fingers and thumb as we do. The hind feet are much wider than the front feet. The animal sits up and easily balances on the hind feet leaving the "hands" free for finding, tearing at, and inspecting the food. Its sense of touch is very acute. It fishes in streams by feel not by sight. Water increases this sense, which is probably why it has the reputation for washing its food. It likes to feel what it is going to eat and to discard any bad parts.

Raccoons are solitary animals although their ranges may overlap. If two meet, the fur on the back of their necks and shoulders stands on end, they growl, lower their heads, bare their teeth, and flatten their ears. The usual result is that they both back off and go their separate ways.

Although rather sedentary animals, the male may travel many miles in search of a mate. The female will mate with only one male each season. He stays in her den a week or more, then off he goes to seek another wife. The female prefers to make a leaf nest in a hollow tree, sometimes some distance from the ground, but may choose a cave or a cleft in the rocks.



The young are born in April or May; the litters averaging four or five. The babies are blind and helpless at birth but by 7 or 8 weeks are clambering about the den. When they are very small the mother will carry them about by the nape of the neck, like a cat does kittens, but they are soon able to go on short foraging trips. Raccoons are good climbers and the mother will boost her babies up a tree if threatened. She will attack ferociously if cornered. Some young will leave the family in the fall, others may stay through the winter but will be driven away before the next litter is born.

RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*)

