

OUR INCREDIBLE WORLD **INCREDIBLE SPECIES** NEWSLETTER



Wolverine

From the pages of Marvel Comics to the big screen, Wolverine is a super hero who thrills fans with his powers. How much do the real wolverine and the fictional Wolverine have in common? The X-Men team member has retractable claws - but the real wolverine does not. They're both extremely tough however, the super hero has an amazing power to heal himself. He can recover quickly from almost any injury.



"Wolverine" courtesy of [Marvel Comics](#)

While the superhero seems too powerful to ever be defeated, the real wolverine is in trouble and needs protection. Human activity, including hunting and intruding on the wolverine's space has caused this amazing animal's numbers to drop dramatically over the past 100 years. Now the wolverine is a "species at risk" - meaning if we don't protect it, it will eventually become extinct.

Very few people have actually seen a wolverine in the wild. Why? This species needs vast, wild spaces away from human activity in order to thrive. Males roam up to 24 kilometres or 15 miles per day in search of food.

Very little is known about the wolverine and its habits. But scientists must quickly learn more about the wolverine, if they are to save this remarkable, tough creature.



Wolverine

Photo: Dave Watts

Get the Facts

Scientific Name: Gulo gulo

Average lifespan: 7-12 years (in the wild)

Average weight: 13-18 kilos or 30-40 pounds

Appearance: The wolverine looks like a small bear. Its fur is dark brown with a light stripe running down either side of its body.

Family Matters: The wolverine may look like a little bear, but it's actually the largest member of the weasel family.

Special Features: The wolverine has powerful teeth and a powerful jaw – allowing it to rip through frozen meat it finds in the winter.

Diet: Primarily a scavenger, the wolverine searches for carrion (animals that are already dead). Wolverines will act as predators – when necessary. They'll also defend their territory. (Wolverines are surprisingly powerful and have been known to win fights with bears and other large animals.) Plants and berries are part of the wolverine's diet in the summer.

Reproduction: The average litter size is 1-3 kits or cubs (names given to baby wolverines). When kits are born they are toothless and their eyes are closed. Their fur is all white. Kits are born in dens. The dens are made up of a complicated series of snow tunnels.

Status: The wolverine is considered "Threatened" and is protected by Ontario's Endangered Species Act.



Wolverine kit

Photo: Jeffrey Coleman, U.S. National Park Service

An Expert Hunter

Even though wolverines usually eat dead animals (carrion) that they find, they are also great hunters. Wolverines can move quickly to pounce on their prey. They will climb up a tree or on a rock and jump on an animal's back. They can kill animals as big as a caribou or a moose.

Wolverines have very large feet that look a bit like human feet. When they run quickly on top of the snow it's almost like they are using showshoes.

It's a good thing that wolverines have excellent senses of hearing and smell because their eyesight is very poor. They do most of their hunting at night.



Wolverine on a rock

Photo: [US National Park Service](#)

What's in a Name?

The wolverine is also known as "skunk bear". Why? The male marks its territory with its scent. When the wolverine is disturbed or threatened, it will give off a terrible odor.

The wolverine's scientific name, *Gulo gulo*, means "glutton". A glutton is a greedy eater. Yes, the wolverine is always looking for food - but food isn't always easy to find. When the wolverine does find a dead animal it will eat as much as it needs and then bury the rest for later. What a good idea!

To learn more about species "at risk" in Ontario, check out the [MNR website](#).

Where Does the Wolverine Live?

In Ontario, the wolverine lives in the boreal forest.

What does "boreal" mean?

Boreal means "northern". The boreal forest is Canada's northern-most forest.

What is the climate like in the boreal forest?

The winters are long, dry and cold and the short summers are warm with occasional showers and thunderstorms.

Is the boreal forest only found in Canada?

No. The forest wraps around the northern hemisphere of our planet and makes up approximately 1/3 of the earth's forests.

Do people live in Canada's boreal forest?

Yes. Many of Canada's First Nations communities are based here and depend on the land for their survival.

Did you know there's another name for the boreal forest?

The name is Taiga.

Why is the boreal special?

Approximately half of North America's birds need the boreal forest. And some of Canada's largest and most impressive mammals live here including: grizzly and black bears, wood bison, woodland caribou, moose, elk, wolves and Canada lynx. This forest is working hard to help keep the planet healthy: millions of gallons of water are filtered (naturally) in its wetlands every day.



Photo: [Barry Bridgeford](#)

Is the boreal forest protected from development?

Part of the forest is protected – but we need to protect as much as possible. There are already over 25 species at risk in Ontario's boreal forest.

What's being done to help the wolverine?

Some wolverines in Ontario are being tracked. They were captured and fitted with a radio tracking device and then immediately returned to the wild. Scientists hope to learn more about the wolverines' needs.

Another way scientists are tracking wolverines is through photos. Scientists set "photo traps" in order to capture photos of the wolverines. In most cases they are able to identify specific wolverines by their markings.

Average citizens are asked to call the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) if they happen to spot a wolverine. Of course, it's always best to stay far, far away from all wild animals. They need their space!

Assistance for this project was provided by the Government of Ontario



Go to <http://www.incredibleworld.ca> to find out more about amazing species and their habitats.