

# Muskrat



Muskrats are a semi-aquatic rodent which are often seen in ponds or along streams and rivers. Sometimes confused with beaver, they are much smaller with silky brown fur and a narrow, scaly tail. Their homes are easily identified in marshes as they look like large piles of grass, cattails, small twigs, and mud. They provide excellent ecological benefits by eating cattails and other wetland vegetation that can clog waterways when overabundant. However, muskrats will also burrow into stream banks, ditches and shorelines and eat vegetation from your yard or garden. There are a variety of strategies that can be used to manage nuisance muskrat.

## Food Habits

- Musk rats primarily eat aquatic vegetation like bulrushes and cattails, though they will also eat fruits and vegetables. Fencing around gardens and picking up fallen fruit will encourage muskrats to not use your yard to obtain food.

## Protect Your Pet

- Musk rats are not aggressive, but have sharp teeth for chewing vegetation and may bite if cornered or attacked. Keep pets away to prevent interactions.

## Discourage Muskrat

- Mesh fencing laid flat and secured every few feet along shorelines can deter burrowing activity of muskrats. Fencing should be placed 3 foot below the water and 1 foot above the water.
- Musk rats prefer burrowing in steep slopes. Constructing more gentle slopes (a 3:1 ratio or less) on the shoreline will make an area less attractive to muskrats.
- Riprap a problem area to effectively create a muskrat barrier. Stones should be greater than 6 inches thick, and placed 3 feet below the water and 1 foot above the water.
- Natural vegetation buffers next to water bodies can provide feeding areas and reduce the attractiveness of plantings further from the water.



## Quick Facts

- Unlike beaver, muskrats do not store food in the winter; they must eat fresh vegetation every day, and will make channels in the mud and under the ice to get to and from its house.
- Although the muskrat eats mostly vegetation, they will eat the occasional crayfish, frog or insect, given the opportunity.
- Often confused with the beaver, muskrats have a long thin tail instead of a wide flat tail like beaver. Also, muskrats weigh 2–5 pounds, while beaver average 30–50 pounds and can weigh up to 80 pounds.
- Muskrat shooting and trapping is legal year-round without a DNR license on your own property if the animal is causing damage, although you need landowner permission to release live-trapped muskrat. Many municipalities in Wisconsin have specific regulations regarding the discharge of firearms, so check with your local government to ensure adherence to local ordinances.



For more information, visit our webpage:

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