

# EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES



EXTENSION



Mammals



Trees



Invertebrates



Reptiles & Amphibians

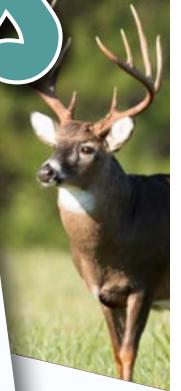


Birds



Fish

# Mammals



Mammals are a diverse group of warm-blooded creatures that have fur or hair, give birth to live young, and have mammary glands (females) for feeding their young.

Many mammals in the U.S. are nocturnal (active at night) or crepuscular (most active at dawn or dusk). Fewer are active during the day (diurnal). Because mammals can be difficult to spot, scientists often use signs, such as tracks, scrapings, rubbings, or other clues, to learn what species live in an area.

This guide describes a few of the more common mammals found in neighborhoods and on farmland. How many do you think live near you?



## Mammals

### NORTHERN RACCOON

EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Northern Raccoon

(*Procyon lotor*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Other names: coon
- Body length: 16–28 inches
- Tail length: 8–16 inches
- Overall gray-brown body
- Characteristic black fur or “mask” around the eyes
- Ringed tail

### HABITAT

The **northern raccoon** is native to the eastern and midwestern U.S. It prefers sparsely wooded areas, lowland forests, and marshes, but it is also a common resident of suburban areas.

### FUN FACT

**Northern raccoons** are thought to be able to make more than 40 different sounds, ranging from hisses and growls to purrs and screams.



## Mammals

### EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL

EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Eastern Gray Squirrel

(*Sciurus carolinensis*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Smaller member of the tree squirrel group
- Body length: 9–12 inches; tail length: 8–10 inches
- Gray upper parts
- Large, bushy tail that is gray above and white below

### HABITAT

The **eastern gray squirrel** is one of the most widely distributed species of native squirrel in North America. **Eastern gray squirrels** prefer dense hardwood forests or forested parks and neighborhoods in suburban and urban areas.

### FUN FACTS

- The **eastern gray squirrel** builds a nest, or “drey,” made of dry leaves and twigs in the forks of branches.
- Unlike most mammals, **eastern gray squirrels** can descend a tree head-first.





## Mammals

### EASTERN FOX SQUIRREL

EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Eastern Fox Squirrel

(*Sciurus niger*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Large member of the tree squirrel group
- Body length: 17–28 inches; tail length: 8–13 inches
- Brown-gray upper body with burnt orange under body
- Strong claws for climbing

### HABITAT

The **eastern fox squirrel** is native to the U.S. and can most commonly be found in open pine and oak forests lacking dense undergrowth.

### FUN FACT

**Eastern fox squirrels** often make their nests in tree holes created by woodpeckers.



## Mammals

### STRIPED SKUNK

EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Striped Skunk

(*Mephitis mephitis*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Male body length: 20–30 inches; females are 10 percent smaller
- Body dominated by long, black fur with parallel white stripes running lengthwise from neck to tail. In some regions, white fur is confined to the head area.
- Long, curved claws on forefeet for digging up prey
- Emits a foul smell to deter potential predators

### HABITAT

The **striped skunk** is a native species that prefers mixed woodlands, brushy areas, and open fields, although it is also a common resident of suburban areas.

### FUN FACT

**Striped skunks** stamp their front feet as a warning before spraying.



## Mammals

### RED FOX

EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Red Fox

(*Vulpes vulpes*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Member of the Canid (dog) family and largest of all fox species
- Height: 14–20 inches; body length: 18–35 inches; tail length: 12–22 inches
- Long, rusty-red fur over most of the upper body with white chin and chest; silver and black variations can occur
- White fur on tip of the tail is common

### HABITAT

The **red fox** is a native species in the U.S. and can be found in open forests, farmlands, and suburban and urban areas.

### FUN FACT

**Red foxes** can be found almost everywhere in the Northern Hemisphere, except in extreme habitats such as the Arctic and deserts.



## Mammals

### DEER MOUSE

EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Deer Mouse

(*Peromyscus* sp.)

### DESCRIPTION

- Rodent in a genus of New World mice
- Body length: 4½–6 inches; tail length: 2–4 inches
- Large, round ears; large, black eyes; long whiskers
- Rich brown to reddish-brown fur on upper parts; white fur on the belly and underside of tail

### HABITAT

Native to the U.S., **deer mice** can most often be found in woodland areas, although they can also be found in suburban settings.

### FUN FACT

In the wild, a **deer mouse** has a life expectancy of only a year, but, in captivity, they can live up to 8 years.



EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## House Mouse

(*Mus musculus*)

### DESCRIPTION

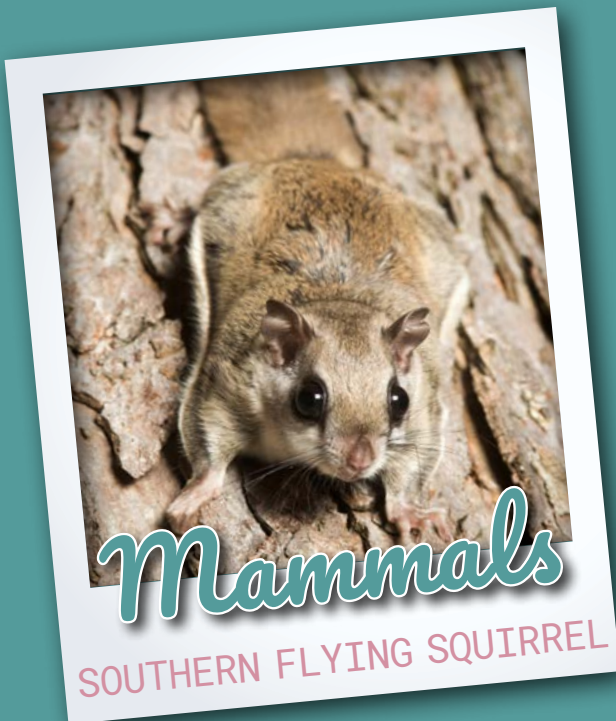
- Rodent in a genus of Old World mice
- Body length: 3–4 inches; tail length: 2–4 inches
- Relatively uniform gray-brown body, including belly; some with lighter-colored underbelly
- Ears and tail have sparse coverings of fur

### HABITAT

As their name implies, **house mice** are commonly found in human-dominated environments, including houses, outbuildings, and surrounding cover.

### FUN FACT

The hind legs of **house mice** are so strong that they can jump vertically up to 18 inches.



EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Southern Flying Squirrel

(*Glaucomys volans*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Body length: 8–10 inches; tail length: 3–5 inches
- Gliding membrane extending from wrist to ankle on both sides of the body
- Gray fur; large eyes for nocturnal vision

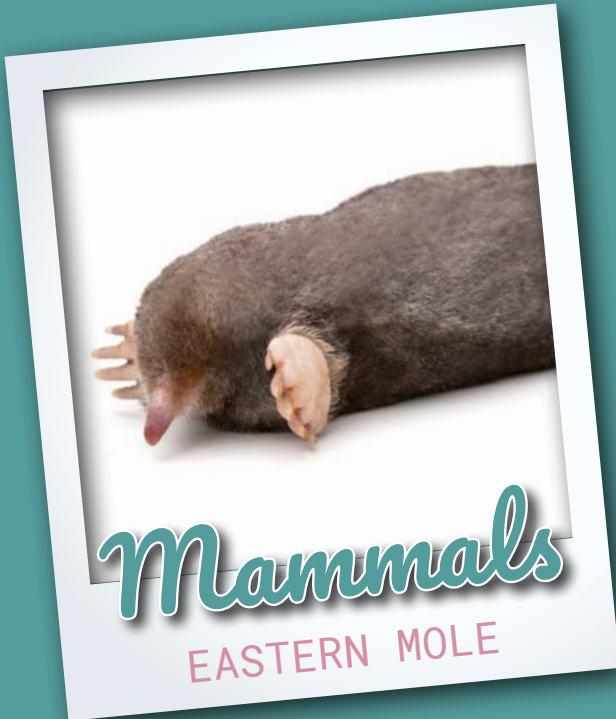
### HABITAT

The **southern flying squirrel** is native to the U.S. It prefers hardwood forests with seed-producing trees for food and cavities for shelter.

### FUN FACT

Despite their name, **southern flying squirrels** don't fly. Instead, they glide through the air from high perches to lower locations.





EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Eastern Mole

(*Scalopus aquaticus*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Body length: 4–6.7 inches; tail length: 0.5–1.5 inch
- Thick, velvety fur ranging in color from silver to black
- Large feet with webbed toes to aid in digging
- No external eyes or ears

### HABITAT

This native species is found in the eastern U.S. and can most frequently be found in fields, meadows, and other grassy locations, including neighborhood yards.

### FUN FACTS

- **Eastern moles** are expert diggers and can dig up to 14 feet in 1 hour in their search for grubs, worms, and other prey.
- With no ears or eyes, the **eastern mole** relies on smell, touch, and vibration to find its way around.



EKOKIDS: SCHOOLYARD NATURE GUIDES  
Mississippi State University Extension Service

## Eastern Cottontail

(*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Common member of the rabbit group
- Body length: 15–19 inches
- Upper body is mixed shades of brown, gray, and black; the belly is white
- Characteristic round, white, fluffy tail

### HABITAT

The **eastern cottontail** is native to the eastern and midwestern U.S. It prefers brushy habitats with good groundcover. It can be found in orchards, farmlands, hedgerows, and suburban neighborhoods.

### FUN FACT

The female **eastern cottontail** builds a ground nest of dried grass lined with fur from its belly to raise its offspring.



## White-tailed Deer

(*Odocoileus virginianus*)

### DESCRIPTION

- Males (bucks) are larger than females (does); average male weight: 150 pounds
- Males and females look similar: reddish-brown summer coat; gray-brown winter coat
- White belly, throat, and underside of tail
- Males annually grow antlers starting in early spring, shedding them in winter after the breeding season

### HABITAT

White-tailed deer are native to the eastern and midwestern U.S. They prefer forests with dense understory or brushy habitats along fields, pastures, and neighborhoods.

### FUN FACT

White-tailed deer use their tails to signal danger, flashing the bright white underside to signal other deer in the area.

For more information on common wildlife and plants or incorporating nature into the classroom, please contact [Leslie.Burger@msstate.edu](mailto:Leslie.Burger@msstate.edu) or (662) 325-6686.

EkoKids is produced by the Mississippi State University Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture and the MSU Extension Service for use by educators and youth leaders.

Photos from [canstockphoto.com](https://www.canstockphoto.com).

Publication 3044-A (05-24)

By **Leslie Burger**, PhD Assistant Extension Professor, Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture.

Copyright 2024 by Mississippi State University. All rights reserved. This publication may be copied and distributed without alteration for nonprofit educational purposes provided that credit is given to the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Produced by Agricultural Communications.

Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. Discrimination in university employment, programs, or activities based on race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other status protected by applicable law is prohibited.

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. ANGUS L. CATCHOT JR., Director

# Mammals

EKOKIDS :  
SCHOOLYARD  
NATURE GUIDES

  
MISSISSIPPI STATE  
UNIVERSITY-  
EXTENSION