

North American Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*)



Taxonomy:

Family Erethizontidae. Seven subspecies are recognized. *Erethizon dorsatum epixanthum* is the regional subspecies

Description:

Readily identified by its large size and characteristic pelage that includes defensive quills.

Total length: 600-1300 mm; Tail: 175-250 mm; Hind foot: 95-115 mm; 3.5 – 18 kg.



Distribution:

Alaska and Canada (except for the high arctic), south into New England and the mountainous western US. Occurs over a broad elevational range along the Wasatch Front.

Ecology and diet:

Although porcupines are most commonly associated with forests, they have been recorded throughout many different habitats ranging from desert shrub to alpine tundra. They consume a wide variety of plant matter during the warm season, including green vegetation, fruits and seeds, and feed primarily on woody vegetation during winter. Populations in the intermountain region have fluctuated over the past several decades.

Life History:

Mating occurs in the fall, and after a 7 month gestation, a single young (rarely twins) is born in the spring. Newborns are highly precocial and can feed on their own after 1 week although they remain with the mother through the summer. Adults can live for 10 years or more.

References: Woods 1973; Sweitzer et al. 1997.