

Welcome Teachers!

This packet has been designed to allow you to bring excitement, curiosity and hands-on learning to your students! On the following pages you will find a fact sheet related directly to an animal biofact (fur, feathers, bones...) that you have in your teacher pack. Some of the biofacts are from animals that you may see on your journey, some are from other interesting prairie animals, many that you may see in your own back yard!

Use the facts in this packet and biofacts in your teacher pack to give your students an enriching and hands-on experience. We ask that the materials are treated with respect and integrity, but encourage your students to touch, inquire and, of course, learn!

Contents of the 3rd/4th grade teacher pack:

Bobcat - skull, claw, repliscat and photo

Turkey vulture - skull and photo

Coyote - skull, claw, repliscat and photo

Black bear – hide and photo

Cottontail rabbit - repliscat and photo

Whitetail deer - repliscat and photo

Turkey - repliscat and photo

Opossum - repliscat and photo

Track rubbing plates – 16 plates of various animals

Biofact(s) – Bobcat Skull, claw, repliscat and photo

Description:

- The bobcat is a small wild cat that can be found throughout the North American prairie.
- The bobcat got its name due to its short stumpy tail. It appears to have been bobbed, or cut off.
- It has a tawny coat with various speckles and streaks of color ranging from light brown to black. This coat makes for excellent camouflage on the prairie.
 - The bobcat needs camouflage in order to sneak up on prey, as well as to avoid encounters with other animals and humans.
- The skull of the bobcat is loaded with 28 teeth.
 - They are equipped with four sharp canine teeth that they use to clamp onto prey so that it cannot escape.

Range and Habitats:

- Historically the bobcat's range is all the lower 48 United States, north into Canada and south into Mexico.
 - Bobcats can adapt to many habitats as well as to humans, allowing for such diversity in range.
- The preferred habitats of the bobcat are forests, semi-deserts, mountains, and transitions between forest and prairie.

Diet:

- Bobcats are carnivores.
 - They are stealthy hunters; they stalk their prey, then pounce and kill with a bite to the vertebrae of the neck.
 - Bobcats hunt rodents, rabbits, deer, large ground birds, and sometimes reptiles.
 - Though rare, they are known to eat small domesticated animals and poultry when other game is in short supply.

Bobcat Fun Facts:

- ❖ The bobcat is the most abundant cat in North America.
- ❖ The bobcat has the greatest range (distribution) of all of the North American cats.
- ❖ The bobcat can pounce over ten feet in distance!

Biofact(s) – Turkey vulture skull and photo

Description:

- The turkey vulture is one of the largest birds of prey in North America, with a wing span of almost six feet!
- The turkey vulture is covered in shiny, dark brown-black feathers.
- The head of the turkey vulture is featherless and red.
 - The lack of feathers is an adaptation of carrion eaters; it allows the bird to lessen the amount of bacteria-infested food matter carried on its head.
- The beak of the turkey vulture is white, and its feet and legs are yellow.
- These birds are easy to distinguish in flight as they hold their wings in a V-shape and rarely flap them.
 - The turkey vulture rides the current of the wind; this allows them to save energy and prolong their aerial searches for carrion.

Range and Habitats:

- The turkey vulture is a year-round resident of the southern United States and Mexico. The northern part of the U.S. is a summer breeding ground for the birds.
- The preferred habitat of the turkey vulture is agricultural land or prairie bordered by trees.
 - This habitat preference allows the bird to have an unobstructed view while searching for food, and a protected place to roost.

Diet:

- The diet of the turkey vulture is primarily made up of carrion, otherwise known as dead animals.
 - While carrion is the primary source of the vulture's food, small, weak or injured animals may sometimes be taken by a turkey vulture.

Turkey Vulture Fun Facts:

- ❖ Vultures have the best developed sense of smell of the birds. This well - adapted sense of smell allows the bird to search for its meal of rotting meat!
- ❖ Turkey vultures, like their stork relatives, defecate on their legs as a body cooling strategy.
 - The evaporating defecation cools the blood in the legs of the bird; the cooled blood circulates to the rest of the bird's body, cooling the entire animal.
- ❖ Circling vultures are not a sure sign of a carcass; the birds use this behavior to gain altitude for a long flight!

Biofact(s) – Coyote skull, claw, repliscat and photo

Description:

- The coyote is a small to medium sized canine.
 - The size of the coyote is bigger than a fox, and markedly smaller than a wolf.
- The coat of the coyote is molted brown with hints of red, black, tan and even white.
 - This coloration allows the coyote to succeed in many types of habitats.
- The tail of the coyote is half of its body length.
 - The tail of the coyote is distinguished by its bottle shape and black tip.
 - Coyotes hold their tails below their backs when running.
 - They have pointed erect ears.

Range and Habitats:

- The coyote is native to the United States, Canada and Mexico.
- Due to the extreme adaptability of the coyote, it can be found in all of the habitat types occurring throughout North America.
 - Coyotes have adapted well to humans and can be found on agricultural lands as well as urban landscapes.

Diet:

- The diet of the coyote is as diverse as its range and habitat; they are primarily carnivores and will eat whatever they can catch.
 - During the fall and winter coyotes will consume large amounts of vegetables and leaves.
 - Although infrequent, in times of hardship coyotes will kill and eat small domestic animals like cats and small dogs.

Coyote Fun Facts:

- ❖ Coyotes are successful due to the misfortune of the wolves. Wolves limited the food and habitat available to coyotes, but coyotes quickly took over these resources after the wolves were extirpated from their original habitat.
- ❖ Coyotes are excellent swimmers and have been known to inhabit islands in large lakes!
- ❖ Coyotes, like other members of the canine family, live in groups called packs. These packs have a strong social order with an alpha member setting the tone.
- ❖ Many Native American cultures have stories that involve coyotes in many different roles, from wise and knowledgeable to crafty and tricky.

Biofact(s) – Black Bear hide and photo

Description:

- The black bear is not always black. It can come in shades of brown, cinnamon, blond and even white.
 - Some black bears have a white patch on their chest.
- The black bear is generally smaller than the grizzly bear, but this is not a good indicator, as size variations are great between individuals in both species.
 - In profile, the grizzly has a large hump on its shoulders and the black bear doesn't.
 - Black bear faces in profile have a straight(ish) line running from forehead to nose.
 - Grizzlies in profile have a concave face.
 - Black bears have longer, more pointed ears
 - Grizzly bears have shorter, rounded ears.

Range and Habitats:

- Historically, black bears inhabited all forested areas across the United States.
 - Though their inhabitation of prairies was limited to transition zones, they did range out into the prairie looking for food.
- Currently, black bears inhabit undisturbed forests.
- Black bears prefer habitats that provide many sources of food, large trees and a constant source of water for drinking and cooling themselves.

Diet:

- Officially, black bears are listed as carnivores, but they eat many kinds of food.
 - Fresh meat and carrion are important sources of protein and fat.
 - Black bears eat many kinds of plants, both grasses and succulents, as well as fruits and nuts.
- Black bears that acclimate to human trash as food often end up being relocated or euthanized due to encounters with humans.

Black Bear Fun Facts:

- ❖ Black bears are less likely to cause injury to humans interfering with her cubs than a grizzly bear mother.
- ❖ Black bears are good swimmers and are known to swim up to a half mile in search of food.
- ❖ Black bears are not true hibernators; they become dormant in winter.

Biofact(s) – Cottontail rabbit repliscat and photo

Description:

- The cottontail rabbit has long erect ears and a short fluffy tail.
- The hind legs are longer than their front legs.
 - The strong back legs are packed with muscles for hopping and jumping power. The large back feet aid in landing when hopping or jumping.
- The fur of the cottontail rabbit is usually reddish brown.
 - The underside of the body as well as tail is white.
- Cottontail rabbits usually weigh between two and four pounds.

Range and Habitats:

- Cottontail rabbits can be found all over the United States.
 - Historically, the rabbits could be found in all habitat types across the continental U.S.
 - Currently, the rabbits are found primarily in habitats that have woody shrubs, bushes and open land.
- Rabbits and humans often live side by side if there is adequate cover.

Diet:

- The cottontail is an herbivore.
 - Most of the diet is made up of complex carbohydrates and cellulose, otherwise known as succulent and woody plants.
 - These are not the most efficiently digested materials so the rabbit has adapted to deal with this.
 - The rabbit must reingest fecal pellets to ensure that it gets as much nutrition from its food as possible.

Cottontail Rabbit Fun Facts:

- ❖ Rabbits use a zigzag pattern when fleeing danger. These quick changes in direction are harder for larger animals to make, giving the rabbit an edge over its predators.
- ❖ Young rabbits become completely self-sufficient at four to five weeks and are ready to mate by three months!
- ❖ Rabbits are often confused with rodents, but belong to their own order called lagomorphs.
- ❖ Rabbits are crepuscular, meaning they are active at dawn and dusk.

Biofact(s) – Whitetail deer replisat and photo

Description:

- The whitetail deer has tawny fur, with the underside being lighter and the underside of the tail being white.
- Males have antlers, females do not.
 - The antlers aid in breeding and courtship. Females are attracted to larger antlers and males can use them to battle for the right to mate with a female.
- Fawns have a speckled, dappled effect on their fur to allow them to be camouflaged.
 - Fawns will lie very still on the forest floor; with their dappling they look like patches of soil with sunlight on them.

Range and Habitats:

- Whitetail deer can be found all over the United States (except for a few states in the west) south into Central America, and north into southern Canada.
- Whitetail deer prefer habitat that has dense stands of woods to hide and shelter in, along with transition areas that provide food.

Diet:

- The whitetail deer is an herbivore.
- The food habits of the whitetail deer vary with the habitat. Eastern deer populations eat different plants than western populations.
 - All deer populations eat leaves, plants, shoots and bark.

Whitetail Deer Fun Facts:

- ❖ Whitetail deer use their tail as a warning flag to others. When fleeing or sensing danger the deer puts its tail up in the air, exposing the white underside. This alerts other deer in the area that perceived danger is near.
- ❖ The whitetail deer boasts a nose that is 100 times more sensitive than our own!
- ❖ Deer are excellent jumpers; they can “broad jump” up to thirty feet, and jump a nine foot tall fence in a single bound.
- ❖ Deer don’t have the best table manners; they gulp down food with little or no chewing. Later they regurgitate the food and chew it better. This behavior allows them to feed quickly and return to safety for chewing and digesting!

Biofact(s) – Turkey replisat and photo

Description:

- The wild turkey is a large ground-dwelling bird with long legs, a long neck, and a large fan shaped tail.
- The male wild turkey is covered in dark feathers ranging in color from brown to iridescent black; the female is similar, with more brown and no iridescence.
 - Domestic turkeys are nearly all white; they were bred to be white as the pigment in their feathers can discolor their meat.
- Males have a reddish or bluish or white head, depending on the season. Females have a grayish head year-round.
- Males and females have a red wattle that hangs from under their beak. It is reduced in the female.
- Males and females have a caruncle, the reddish fleshy lobe above the beak. It hangs over the side of the beak in males, and is reduced in females.

Range and Habitats:

- The wild turkey has a large range. It is widely distributed throughout the eastern and the central U.S., and inhabits small pockets in the western ranges.
- Wild turkeys prefer habitats with woods as well as open land.

Diet:

- The wild turkey is an omnivore.
 - Most of the diet is made up of buds, acorns, nuts and leaves.
 - About 10% of the animal's diet consists of ground dwelling insects and salamanders.

Wild Turkey Fun Facts:

- ❖ Wild turkeys communicate with vocalizations, postures and body language. Scientists recognize about 15 different vocalizations.
- ❖ Wild turkeys are great fliers! Although they primarily spend their time on the ground, they will fly to escape predation or to roost in the trees.
- ❖ Egg dumping is a common turkey phenomenon, where a female turkey lays her eggs in another turkey's nest. Turkeys are also known for egg dumping in the nest of the ruffed grouse.
- ❖ Benjamin Franklin would have rather seen the wild turkey named our national bird than the eagle. He felt that the eagle was a bird of bad morals. This was due to the eagle's habit of stealing food!

Biofact(s) – Opossum repliscat and photo

Description:

- The opossum is about the size of a large house cat and is often mistaken in the dark for a cat.
- The opossum is a silvery gray color with a pink nose and ears.
- The head is triangular and it has a pointed nose.
- The tail of the opossum is prehensile, which means it can wrap around and grasp things.
 - The opossum uses its prehensile tail to wrap around tree branches, and can hang for a short time from its tail. Contrary to popular belief, the opossum doesn't sleep hanging from its tail.
- The opossum has opposable hallux. A hallux is like a thumb and is found on the back feet of the opossum.

Range and Habitats:

- The opossum can be found throughout the U.S., except for higher elevations.
- The opossum can be found in a large variety of habitats, including forests, prairies, agricultural lands as well as the urban landscape.
 - The opossum seems to prefer wetter habitats and is often found in lowlands and marshes.

Diet:

- The opossum is not a picky eater! Its diet consists of snails, slugs, insects, small mammals and carrion.
 - An easy meal for an opossum is pet food left uncovered outside of homes.
- Because a favorite food of the opossum is carrion, and it is often in the form of road kill, the opossum is a frequent victim of fatalities due to motor vehicles.

Opossum Fun Facts:

- ❖ The opossum is the only native marsupial in North America.
- ❖ The opossum is one of the oldest surviving mammals on the planet, it has been around for nearly 70 million years!
- ❖ The opossum is famous for playing dead when it cannot escape danger. The opossum actually goes into a catatonic state and for all practical purposes appears dead. It reawakens when the perceived threat is gone!
- ❖ Other tactics of defense employed by the opossum include hissing and showing the teeth, as well as defecating on itself.
- ❖ The opossum is more resistant to rabies than most mammals.

Biofact(s) –Track rubbing plates

The animals of the prairie are well camouflaged and well adapted to stay out of the sight of humans. Humans are viewed as a threat to wild animals, and they go out of their way to stay out of our way. Field scientists who study wild animals often have to rely on signs left by the animals to determine things like their size, health and direction and speed of travel. Some signs that scientist study are tracks, scat, bedding material and food scraps.

Tracks are an especially good indicator of animal species, size, direction of travel, if any, and speed. People who study tracks and traces left by animals are called ichnologists. Invite your students to become ichnologists and make their own track rubbings!

Instructions for use of track rubbing plates:

Materials:

Track rubbing plates

Paper (reusable office paper has been provided to you in your teacher pack)

Pencil or crayon

Place track rubbing plate face up on a flat surface. Place a piece of paper over the plate and rub gently with the side of the pencil lead or crayon. Encourage students to label their rubbings; identification labels can be found on the back of each plate. If for some reason you notice a plate without a label, please report it to the education department so that it can be replaced.