

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 kindergarten teacher pack:

Bald eagle – stuffed animal and photo

Red fox – skull and photo

Opossum – skull, replisat and photo

Cottontail rabbit – skull and photo

Common snapping turtle – skull and photo

Bobcat – replisat and photo

Wild turkey – replisat and photo

Whitetail deer –replisat and photo

Track rubbing plates – plates of 16 various animals

Biofact(s) – Bald eagle stuffed animal and photo

Description:

- The bald eagle is a large bird of prey with dark contour and flight feathers, and in mature birds a white feathered head.
 - Immature bald eagles have a dark feathered head that turns to white in their fourth or fifth year.
- The beak, legs and eyes of the mature bald eagle are yellow in color. Until about four to five years of age the beak, legs and feet are dark in color.
- The toes of the bald eagle end in sharp powerful talons that aid in the catching of slimy fish.
 - The feet of the bald eagle are rough; this too aids in the catching and gripping of fish.
- The bald eagle is an apt flier, but often relies on wind currents to carry it through the sky. This behavior allows the eagle to conserve energy and remain in the skies longer.
- Females are generally larger than males and have a slightly longer wing span.

Range and Habitats:

- Historically the bald eagle could be found in all of the 48 contiguous states, Alaska and Canada. Throughout this range, the eagles are normally found near water such as rivers, large lakes or oceans.
- Populations were greatly reduced due to the use of certain pesticides, illegal hunting and habitat destruction. Seeing a bald eagle in the lower 48 states became a rare occurrence.
 - Bald eagles were an endangered species in the lower 48 states until 1995, when through massive conservation efforts it was down listed to a threatened species.
 - Bald eagle populations in Alaska remained strong throughout the endangerment in the lower 48 states.
- While the bald eagle has made a significant comeback, threats like habitat destruction remain real and pressing.

Diet:

- Bald eagles feed primarily on fish, but their diet also consists of small mammals, waterfowl, carrion and the occasional reptile.
- Bald eagles will steal food from other eagles, and sometimes even other species of birds of prey.

Bald Eagle Fun Facts:

- ❖ Benjamin Franklin protested the bald eagle becoming the national bird because of its habit of stealing food from others.
- ❖ The bald eagle got its name from the old English word balde, meaning white because of the white feathers on its head.

Biofact(s) – Red fox skull and photo

Description:

- The red fox is a small canine ranging from 6.5 pounds to 16 pounds.
- Color varies greatly from population to population. Generally the red fox is a rusty red color as the name implies. The underside is usually lighter in color from tawny to white.
- The lower parts of the legs are usually dark brown to black, and the tip of the bushy tail is white or black.

Range and Habitats:

- Red foxes can be found throughout North America, Alaska, Canada, all of Europe, and almost all of Asia, and they have been introduced in Australia.
- The red fox can be found in a wide variety of habitats including forest, tundra, prairie, agricultural lands and even in urban areas. In Wichita the red fox is a frequent sight all over town after dark.

Diet:

- The red fox is an opportunist eating a wide variety of foods including small mammals, insects, small reptiles and even trash.
 - Urban foxes will often eat food left out for pets.
- The fox has a fascinating way of hunting mice. It stands motionless waiting for a mouse that it has seen or heard, then as soon as the mouse makes a sound the fox jumps up into the air, coming down on the mouse with its front paws. This pins the mouse to the ground until the fox can get it in its mouth!

Red Fox Fun Facts:

- ❖ The red fox will hunt even if it is not hungry. It will hide food under leaves and in holes. It will return later when it is hungry and eat its cache!
- ❖ Red foxes use their large bushy tails to keep them from losing body heat when sleeping. The tail is tucked around the face, keeping the nose warm, and warming the air that the fox inhales.
- ❖ The red fox appears in fairy tails, fables and native folklore, and is often portrayed as sneaky and conniving!
- ❖ The red fox is the most widely dispersed terrestrial carnivore on the planet!

Biofact(s) – Opossum skull, 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) – Cottontail rabbit skull and photo

Description:

- The cottontail rabbit has speckled brown and gray fur on the upper part of its body, which fades to tawny or white on the underside. It has speckled brown and reddish fur around its neck.
- The underside of the tail of the cottontail rabbit is white, giving it its name.
- The large upright ears of the rabbit allow it to hear predators approaching with its keen sense of hearing.

Range and Habitats:

- The cottontail rabbit can be found from the east coast to the Rocky Mountains.
- Historically the cottontail preferred wooded lands for its habitat, but as European settlers cut down the forests of the east the cottontail rapidly adapted to the open lands and now prefers them.
- Cottontails utilize a wide variety of habitats including woodlands, prairies and agricultural lands as well as the urban landscape.

Diet:

- The cottontail is an herbivore and eats a wide variety of plants, fruits, vegetables and woody plant material.
 - The cottontail is often a garden pest, eating the shoots of newly growing plants.
- Due to the high amount of hard to digest material in the diet of the rabbit it eats its fecal pellets, allowing it to re-digest the material and gain more nutrition.

Cottontail Rabbit Fun Facts:

- ❖ The difference between rabbits and hares is that rabbits are born blind, hairless and helpless, while hares are born with the eyes open and seeing, they have fur and are capable of independent movement.
- ❖ Cottontails often hide their nests in plain sight, like in the middle of your yard. They dig a hole up to three inches deep and line it with vegetation and fur from the mother's chest. The mother will return to nurse only two times a day as the milk is very rich. Many well-meaning people find baby rabbits and think they have been abandoned, when in fact the mother is away foraging or hiding. If a rabbit nest is encountered, the best policy is to leave it be. The mother will listen to her instincts and return in accordance to her natural schedule.
- ❖ Protection of flowers and garden plants is often necessary if a rabbit has made your yard home. There are many safe and non-lethal ways to protect your garden; some are as easy as planting clover around your garden to entice the rabbits to eat that rather than your seedlings!

Biofact(s) – Common snapping turtle skull and photo

Description:

- The common snapping turtle has a relatively small shell for its size. It cannot fully retract its limbs and head into the shell for protection.
- The carapace, or top shell of this turtle, ranges in color from a dark brown-black to very dark olive in color.
- The carapace of common snapping turtles has a series of saw tooth-like protruding plates on the rear, and in mature individuals the carapace is nearly smooth.
- The plastron, or lower shell, is small and much lighter in color than the carapace.
- The neck and tail of this turtle are very long. In immature individuals the tail can be longer than the entire length of the carapace!

Range and Habitats:

- The range of the common snapping turtle is through the eastern 2/3 of the U.S. from southern Canada south through the Great Plains.
- The preferred habitat of the common snapping turtle is slow moving or still fresh water.
- The common snapping turtle sits in wait for its prey-therefore, it prefers a body of water with a muddy bottom, vegetation and even fallen wood to help it conceal itself and hunt efficiently.

Diet:

- Two-thirds of the common snapping turtle's diet consists of fish, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, occasional water fowl, and organic matter that falls to the bottom of the water.
- One-third of the diet consists of water plants and vegetation.

Common Snapping Turtle Fun Facts:

- ❖ The color of the snapping turtle's carapace is often obscured by moss and algae growing on the shell; this also aids the turtles camouflage efforts.
- ❖ When in the water, the snapping turtle will quietly swim away from threats. When on dry land, the turtle's best defense is a good offense and will attack when threatened. With its long neck, sharp beak and powerful body, a lunging bite from a snapping turtle can be a very painful experience!
- ❖ A snapping turtle basking in the sun out of the water is not a common sight. Unlike many other turtles, common snapping turtles may bask by floating at the surface, but rarely leave the water for anything other than laying eggs.

Biofact(s) – Bobcat replisat 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) – Wild 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) – 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) –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.