




WILD COUSINS OF THE DOMESTIC FERRET



Mustelids are mammals that belong to the weasel family. Mustelids include 65 species (and 25 genera) of weasels, badgers, ferrets, fishers, grisons, martens, otters, polecats, stoats, minks, tayras, wolverines, and more. The earliest mustelids appeared during the early Oligocene Epoch, roughly 35 million years ago.



These fearless carnivores (meat-eaters) live in Africa, Europe, Asia, and North and South America. The smallest mustelid is the least weasel, weighing 1.2 to 2.4 ounces (35-70 grams); the biggest mustelid is the South American giant otter, weighing 60-90 pounds.


Anatomy: Most Mustelids have sloping heads, long bodies, small, rounded ears, small eyes, and short legs and 5-toed feet with claws. Some species have webbing between the toes and are aquatic. As a defense they have well-developed anal scent glands which produce a potent repellent smell.



Name/photo	Notes
<p>Black-footed ferret:</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Mustela nigripes</i></p> <p>Size: Height: 6 in Length: 18-24 in (including 5-6 in tail) Weight: 1.5-2.5 lbs</p> <p>Life-span: 3years (wild); 8- 9 years (captivity)</p> <p>Range: Historical range across the Great Plains, from southern Canada to northern Mexico. As of 2013 reintroduction programs have now placed ferrets in 20 locations within their former range in eight U.S. states, Canada and Mexico.</p> <p>Diet: 90% prairie dogs; 10% ground dwelling small animals and birds.</p> <p>Comments: Nocturnal. Only ferret native to North American continent. (Domestic ferret is of European origin.)</p> <p>Conservation Status: Endangered (US Endangered Species Act); IUCN – Red List (Endangered); CITES: Appendix 1</p>


Name/photo	Notes
<p>European polecat:</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Mustela putorius putorius</i></p> <p>Size: Males: 350–460 mm in body length; tail: 115-167 mm; weight: 1,000-1,500 grams Females: 290–394 mm; tail: 84–150 mm; weight 650-815 grams.</p> <p>Life-span: 5 years, up to 11 years in captivity</p> <p>Range: Europe, including the United Kingdom, Western part of Russia, Southern Finland; Northern Africa. The European polecat is widespread in the western Palaearctic to the Urals in the Russian Federation, though it is absent from Ireland, northern Scandinavia, and much of the Balkans and eastern Adriatic coast. It occurs only marginally in northern Greece. It is found in Morocco in the Rif Mountains, from sea level to 2400 m.</p> <p>Diet: Small rodents, birds, amphibians and reptiles.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least Concern</p>
<p>Fisher</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Martes pennanti</i> The fisher is closely related to but larger than the American marten (<i>Martes americana</i>).</p> <p>Size: Males are 90 to 120 cm (35–47 in) in length and weigh 3.5 to 6 kilograms (8–13 lb). Females measure 75 to 95 cm (30–37 in) and weigh 2 to 2.5 kg (4–6 lb)</p> <p>Life-span: About 7 years</p> <p>Range: Native to North America, the fisher is a forest-dwelling creature whose range covers much of the boreal forest in Canada to the northern United States.</p> <p>Diet: An omnivore, the fisher feeds on a wide variety of small animals and occasionally on fruits and mushrooms. It shows a preference for the snowshoe hare and is one of the few predators able to prey on porcupines successfully. Despite its common name, the fisher seldom eats fish.</p> <p>Conservation status: Least concern.</p>



Name/photo	Notes
<p>Grison</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Galictis vittata</i>: greater grison; <i>Galictis cuja</i> – lesser grison</p> <p>Size: Length: 16–22 inches, tail an additional 6-8 inches. Weight: 2–6.5 pound</p> <p>Life-span: 12-13 years in captivity.</p> <p>Range: Native to Central and South America.</p> <p>Greater Grison: South American through Central American to southern Mexico. Lesser Grison: Southern half of South America</p> <p>Diet: Omnivorous, consuming fruit and small animals</p> <p>Comments: Diurnal. Gregarious. They climb, swim, and burrow adeptly. Generally terrestrial, burrowing and nesting in holes in fallen trees or rock crevices, often living underground. Their backs are grayish or brown and their limbs, lower parts, and faces are black; a white stripe runs across the forehead and along the sides of the neck.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least concern.</p>
<p>Honey badger (Ratel)</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Mellivora capensis</i></p> <p>Size: Honey badgers are the largest terrestrial mustelids in Africa. Adults measure 23 to 28 cm (9.1 to 11.0 in) in shoulder height and 55–77 cm (22–30 in) in body length, with the tail adding another 12–30 cm (4.7–11.8 in). Females are smaller than males. Males weigh 9 to 16 kg (20 to 35 lb) while females weigh 5 to 10 kg (11 to 22 lb) on average.</p> <p>Life-span: Unknown in the wild; up 26 years in captivity.</p> <p>Range: Native to Africa, Southwest Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, Despite its name, the honey badger does not closely resemble other badger species; instead, it bears more anatomical similarities to weasels.</p> <p>Diet: It is primarily a carnivorous species and has few natural predators because of its thick skin and ferocious defensive abilities.</p>

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	<p>Comments: Known for their fearlessness, honey badgers are mostly solitary, but may hunt in pairs during the breeding season, in May.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least concern</p>
<p>Marbled polecat</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Vormela peregusna</i></p> <p>Size: Ranging in length from 29–35 cm (head and body), the marbled polecat has a short muzzle and very large, noticeable ears; weight: 700 g (25 oz)</p> <p>Life-span: Unknown; 8 to 9 years in captivity</p> <p>Range: Marbled polecats are generally found in the drier areas and grasslands of southeastern Europe to western China.</p> <p>Diet: Marbled polecats are known to eat ground squirrels, Libyan jirds (<i>Meriones libycus</i>), Armenian hamsters, voles, mole rats, house mice and other rodents, small hares, birds, lizards, fish, frogs, snails, and insects (beetles and crickets), as well as fruit and grass. They are also recorded as taking small domestic poultry such as chickens and pigeons, as well as stealing smoked meat and cheese.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Vulnerable (IUCN 3.1)</p>
<p>American pine marten</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Martes americana</i></p> <p>Size: Sexual dimorphism is pronounced, with males averaging about 15% larger than females in length and as much as 65% larger in body weight.^[4] Body length ranges from 1.5 to 2.2 feet (0.5–0.7 m). Adult weight ranges from 1.1 to 3.1 pounds (0.5–1.4 kg) and varies by age and location</p> <p>Life-span: Up to 15 years</p> <p>Range: Found in coniferous and northern deciduous forests across the Northern Hemisphere</p> <p>Diet: Martens are omnivorous, with a diet consisting of squirrels, mice, rabbits, birds, fish, insects, and eggs, and they will also eat fruit and nuts when these are available.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least Concern</p>

Name/photo	Notes
<p data-bbox="218 326 279 354">Mink</p> 	<p data-bbox="793 298 968 326">Latin binomial:</p> <p data-bbox="793 358 1923 477">Size: Males weigh about 1 kg (2.2 lb) and is about 61 cm (24 in) in length. Farm bred males can reach 3.2 kg (7.1 lb). The female weighs about 600 g (1.32 lb) and reaches a length of about 51 cm (20 in). The sizes above do not include the tail which can be from 12.8 cm (5.0 in) to 22.8 cm (9.0 in).</p> <p data-bbox="793 509 1251 537">Life-span: Up to 10 years in captivity.</p> <p data-bbox="793 570 1915 630">Range: A semiaquatic species of mustelid native to North America, though human intervention the mink has expanded its range to many parts of Europe and South America.</p> <p data-bbox="793 662 1892 722">Diet: Mink prey on fish and other aquatic life, small mammals, birds and eggs; adults may eat young mink.</p> <p data-bbox="793 755 1944 997">Comments: American and European species. The American mink is larger and more adaptable than the European mink. Due to variations in size, an individual mink usually cannot be determined as European or American with certainty without looking at the skeleton. There is one exception to this rule: all European minks have a large white patch on their upper lip, while only some American minks do. Thus, any mink with no such patch is certainly of the American variety. Taxonomically, both American and European minks used to be placed in the same genus <i>Mustela</i> ("weasels"), but most recently the American mink has been reclassified as belonging to its own genus <i>Neovison</i>.</p> <p data-bbox="793 1029 1226 1057">Conservation Status: Least Concern</p>

Name/photo	Notes
<p>Steppe polecat</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Mustela eversmanii</i></p> <p>Size: The species is very close to the European polecat in general appearance, proportions and habits, though its body seems somewhat more elongated, due to its shorter guard hairs. Males measure 320–562 mm in body length, while females measure 290–520 mm. Tail length of males is 80–183 mm and 290–520 mm for females. Males in Siberia may weigh up to 2,050 grams, while females weigh 1,350 grams.</p> <p>Life-span: Not documented: 4-5 years in the wild; 8 to n10 years in captivity.</p> <p>Range: The species occurs from Central and Eastern Europe in the west through southern Russia, northern Georgia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan to Mongolia and northern and western China</p> <p>Diet: Unlike the European polecat, which feeds mostly on mouse-like rodents, the steppe polecat preys on larger, steppe-dwelling mammals such as ground squirrels, hamsters, pikas and young or injured adult marmots. Ground squirrels are its most frequent prey throughout the year.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least Concern.</p>
<p>Tayra</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Eira barbara</i></p> <p>Size: Head and body length is 60 to 68 cm, with a tail 38 to 47 cm; they can weigh more than 5 kg.</p> <p>Life-span: 18 years in captivity,</p> <p>Range: Tayras are found across most of South America east of the Andes, except for Uruguay, eastern Brazil, and all but the most northerly parts of Argentina. They are also found across the whole of Central America, in Mexico as far north as southern Veracruz, and on the island of Trinidad. They are generally found only in tropical and subtropical forests, although they may cross grasslands at night to move between forest patches, and they also inhabit cultivated plantations and croplands.</p> <p>Diet: They are opportunistic omnivores, hunting rodents and other small mammals, as well as birds, lizards, and invertebrates, and climbing trees to get fruit and honey. They locate prey</p>

Name/photo	Notes
	<p>primarily by scent, having relatively poor eyesight, and actively chase it once located, rather than stalking or using ambush tactics.</p> <p>Comments: They live in hollow trees, or burrows in the ground.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least Concern</p>
<p>Weasel (Stoat/Ermine)</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Mustela nivalis</i></p> <p>Size: Weasels vary in length from 173 to 217 mm (6.8 to 8.5 in), females being smaller than the males, and usually have red or brown upper coats and white bellies; some populations of some species moult to a wholly white coat in winter. They have long, slender bodies, which enable them to follow their prey into burrows. Their tails may be from 34 to 52 mm (1.3 to 2.0 in) long</p> <p>Life-span: 4 to 5 years</p> <p>Range: Native to Eurasia, North America and North Africa, though it has been introduced to New Zealand, Australia, Malta, Crete, Bermuda, Madeira Island, the Azores, the Canary Islands, Sao Tome, the Falkland Islands, Argentina and Chile.</p> <p>Diet: Small rodents form the largest part of the least weasel's diet, but it also kills and eats rabbits and other mammals, and occasionally birds, birds' eggs, fish and frogs</p> <p>Comments: Smallest species in the Mustelidae Family, as well as the smallest of the Carnivora.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least Concern</p>

Name/photo	Notes
<p>Wolverine</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Gulo gulo</i></p> <p>Size: Length from 65–107 cm (26–42 in), a tail of 17–26 cm (6.7–10.2 in), and a weight of 9–25 kg (20–55 lb), though exceptionally large males can weigh up to 32 kg (71 lb). The males are as much as 30% larger than the females and can be twice the females' weight.</p> <p>Life-span: 5-13 years; up to 17 in captivity</p> <p>Range: Majority live in Canada. Wolverines live primarily in isolated arctic and alpine regions of northern Canada, Alaska, Siberia, and Scandinavia; they are also native to European Russia, the Baltic countries, the Russian Far East, northeast China and Mongolia.</p> <p>Diet: Prey mainly consists of small to medium-sized mammals, but the wolverine has been recorded killing prey such as adult deer that are many times larger than itself. Prey species include porcupines, squirrels, beavers, marmots, rabbits, voles, mice, shrews, lemmings, caribou, roe deer, white-tailed deer, mule deer, sheep, moose, and elk. Smaller predators are occasionally preyed on, including martens, mink, foxes, Eurasian lynx, weasels, and coyote and wolf pups. Wolverines have also been known to kill Canadian lynx in the Yukon of Canada.¹</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least concern.</p>
<p>Zorilla (Striped polecat)</p> 	<p>Latin binomial: <i>Ictonyx striatus</i></p> <p>Size: 60–70 cm (24–28 in) in length, including their tails, and 10–15 cm (3.9–5.9 in) tall to the shoulders on average. They weigh anywhere from .6 kg (1.3 lb) to 1.3 kg (2.9 lb), generally, the males being the larger of the two sexes.¹</p> <p>Life-span: 5 years</p> <p>Range: It lives predominantly in dry and arid climates, such as the savannahs and open country of Central, Southern, and sub-Saharan Africa, excluding the Congo basin and the more coastal areas of West Africa.</p> <p>Diet: Its diet includes various small rodents, snakes, birds, amphibians, and insects.</p> <p>Conservation Status: Least Concern.</p>

Other information: <http://www.thatpetblog.com/2011/06/15/the-domestic-ferrets-interesting-relatives/>