

## The American Bison



Photo by United States Agricultural Research Service

### What is an American Bison?

Have you ever seen an American bison? It has big broad shoulders and it's covered in dark brown fur. Its large head hangs below its shoulders as it reaches for grass on the ground. This giant mammal also fashions a dark brown furry beard and two curved horns. The horns help the bison to fight for **dominance** within its herd and also to fight off predators!

How big is this hairy creature? An American bison can weigh up to 1,000 kilograms which makes it no surprise that it's North America's largest land mammal. Undeterred by its size, this huge animal can run up to 62 kilometers per hour and can even go for swims!

There used to be 20 to 30 million bison roaming across North America but they were hunted in such large numbers that in the 19th century, they almost became extinct. Luckily for the bison, the people decided to do something; they set aside **conservation** land where the bison could roam freely without being hunted by humans. Now, their population is stable and there are around 500,000 American bison to be found grazing across Canada, the United States and Northern Mexico.

## The Timber Wolf



Photo by Eva Blue on Unsplash

### What is a Timber Wolf?

“Aaa Wooo!” Have you ever heard a howling timber wolf? Maybe you have heard the howl of a dog, the wolf's close relative. Similar to many of the dogs that we keep in our homes, timber wolves stand on four legs, have long snouts and use their urine to mark territory. However, it would not be a good idea to keep a wolf at home because they are wild animals and they are not **domesticated** like the dogs that we are used to having around. Also, a wolf's howling and urine-marking are much more important parts of its survival in the wild.

Howling is another way for wolves to claim their territory but they also howl to communicate with their wolf families, which are called packs. Each wolf in a pack has its own personality and every wolf's howl is unique. Through their unique howls, the wolves can recognize each other from far away and even show affection to the other wolves in their pack.

While there are a variety of wolves around the world, today we are talking about the timber wolf. The timber wolf is also known as the gray wolf or the tundra wolf and as the name “gray wolf,” suggests, these furry animals are often gray but they can also be brown, all white or all black! The timber wolf can be found in parts of North America, Europe, and Asia and they prefer to live in the wilderness, away from humans. The timber wolf is usually between 100 to 200 centimeters in length and can weigh up to 80 kilograms.

## The American Beaver



Photo by Becky Matsubara on Flickr

### **What is an American Beaver?**

The American beaver is a dark-brown or reddish-brown furry animal with bright orange teeth and a long, black, scaly tail. The beaver uses its tail to “slap” the water as it swims. Why does the beaver do this? It’s a warning to the other beavers that danger might be near!

Beavers also use their funky tails for other things; they use them as propellers to swim faster in the water and they use them for balance as they gnaw on all kinds of trees. Beavers teeth keep on growing throughout their whole lives and so they need to keep on gnawing to keep their teeth from getting too long. The beavers have a thick coat of iron-filled **enamel** on their teeth which help them to gnaw on the trees and which also gives their teeth their bright orange color.

So, beavers are big and furry and not including their tails, they can be as long as 1 meter. However, they are actually **rodents**, like mice and rats and squirrels; this is because their teeth continue to grow forever and ever, until they die. Yes, beavers are rodents and they are in fact, the biggest rodents in North America. With their webbed feet, they can be found swimming underwater in many parts across the United States and Canada. As they spend a lot of time in the water, it makes sense that they make their homes next to ponds, lakes and rivers.

## Fairy Shrimp



Photo by coniferconifer on Flickr

### **What are Fairy Shrimp**

Let’s dive into a small pond and take a glance at some tiny little critters! Look around, can you see some creatures, smaller than your thumb, with lots of swimming legs and little bug-like eyes? Those might just be fairy shrimp, a small **crustacean** that can be as short as 6 millimeters and as long as 17 centimeters. Typically, however, these small creatures are between 1 and 5 centimeters long.

The fairy shrimp can be translucent, peach-colored, redish-orangish and even blue or green. They have an **exoskeleton** which is an outer skeleton that protects its body which is made up of three main body parts: a head, a thorax and an abdomen. Fairy shrimp have two compound eyes and two sets of antennae. Their thoraxes and abdomens are light, bendy and delicate; unlike other crustaceans, fairy shrimp don’t have **carapaces**, which are hard outer shells used for protection. Their bodies are attached to 11 pairs of legs that they use for swimming, breathing and eating.

Fairy shrimp can be found in **vernal** pools which are small bodies of water that come and go as the seasons change. They can also be found in other pools of water along the sides of roads, in rain-soaked fields, ponds and small, seasonal wetlands. In one liter of such water, we can usually find about 200 of these fairy shrimp.