

## American mink

### *Neovison vison*

Mink are an important part of the native wilderness of North America, and are regularly spotted along the Chicago River. Like many larger predators, it is a species that needs space if it is to thrive and coexist with humans.

The mink is a member of the Mustelid family (which includes weasels, otters, wolverines, martens, badgers and ferrets). Historically, two species of mink were found in North America; however, the sea mink is now extinct. It lived exclusively along the Atlantic coast and had adapted to this habitat because of the abundant food (it preferred eating Labrador duck). The sea mink was hunted to extinction in the late 19th century.

The surviving species, the American mink, lives in a wide range of habitats and is found throughout the United States and Canada except for Hawaii and the desert southwest. The American mink has been introduced in Europe where it is considered to be a pest and tends to displace the smaller European mink.

The American mink lives in forested areas that are near rivers, lakes and marshes. The mink is very territorial and males will fight other minks that invade their territory. They are not fussy over their choice of den, as long as it's close to water. They sometimes nest in burrows dug previously by muskrats, badgers or skunks.

The American mink is carnivorous, feeding on rodents, fish, crustaceans, amphibians and even birds. In its natural range, fish are the mink's primary prey. Mink inhabiting sloughs and marshes primarily target frogs, tadpoles, and mice. They are also formidable predators of muskrats, which they will chase underwater and kill in their own burrows. In its introduced range in Europe, the American mink has been linked to declines in European mink and water vole.

The mink has a long, sleek body about two feet long, and a long thick tail. In fact, one third of the mink's length is its tail. They have brown to black fur that is very soft and thick and covered with oily guard hairs that make it waterproof. It is the most frequently farmed animal for its fur, outdoing in economic importance of the silver fox, sable and marten.

While on land, the mink use a bounding gait to run quite quickly. They're able to move at about four mph and can be difficult to catch. American mink are proficient swimmers and are capable of swimming for up to three hours at a time while hunting.

