

The now-extinct *M. divuliana* was the first true fisher in North America and apparently came to North America via the Bering Strait. *M. pennanti* is closely related to *M. divuliana* but is probably not a direct descendant. The fossil record of *M. pennanti* is largely confined to eastern North America;

fisher distribution in the West may have been limited through the Pleistocene by competition with the now-extinct marten *M. nobilis*. The division of *M. pennanti* into subspecies is probably not warranted. R. A. Powell

#### Size

Males are larger and heavier than females.  
Total length: 900–1,200 mm (males); 750–950 mm (females)  
Length of tail: 370–410 mm (males); 310–360 mm (females)  
Weight: 3,500–5,500 g (males); 2,000–2,500 g (females)

#### Identification

The fisher is larger and darker in color than the marten and can be distinguished from it by the lack of a pale chin/chest patch. Its fur is long, except on the face; the legs, tail, and rump are black. Tri-colored guard hairs give the face,

neck, and shoulders a hoary gold or silvery appearance.

#### Other Common Names

Pekan, fisher cat, black cat, wejack, American sable

#### Status

Populations have recovered from extreme lows in early to mid-1900s. Harvested in some states and provinces; listed as endangered in others.

#### Subspecies

*Martes pennanti columbiana*, northern Manitoba to eastern British Columbia and south to Idaho and Utah  
*Martes pennanti pacifica*, coastal British Columbia south through California  
*Martes pennanti pennanti*, northeastern Quebec south to southern Appalachian Mountains, northwest to southern Manitoba and southern Alberta, and south from Alberta to northern Wyoming

#### References

*Mammalian Species* 156; Powell, 1993

## Ermine | *Mustela erminea*

*Mustela erminea* is a mid-sized weasel with the most widespread distribution of all mustelid species. It occurs throughout Canada, including the Arctic islands, and in the northeastern and northwestern United States, extending from Maine to Virginia in the east and into California and New Mexico in the west. It is found in a variety of habitats such as Arctic tundra, coniferous forests, and parklands, and occurs from sea level to an elevation of 3,500 meters.

*Mustela erminea* breeds in mid to late summer, but development of the embryo is delayed until the following March. Gestation is approximately 27 days, and 4–9 young are born in a well-formed nest often located in a rodent burrow or hollow log. Females usually rear young alone, although male assistance has been reported. Young ermine are quite helpless at birth. Their eyes and ears are sealed and their bodies are naked. The female can be remarkably aggressive in her defense of the young. The young grow rapidly, and by 6 weeks of age males are as heavy as their mothers. They reach adult size shortly thereafter. The mother plays an active role in teaching the young how to hunt, and family groups can sometimes be seen travelling together in search of prey. Ermine actively defend their territories from other, trespassing ermine.

*Mustela erminea* is primarily nocturnal and has well developed senses of sight and smell. It is a quick and agile predator,



*Mustela erminea*

using its slender body to enter small burrows and crevices in search of mice, voles, and young rabbits. Squirrels, frogs, and earthworms also may be taken. Ermine are found wherever prey are abundant, and in winter their presence can often be



**Size**

Males are approximately twice the size of females.

Total length: 219–343 (272) mm (males); 190–292 (240) mm (females)

Length of tail: 65–90 (75) mm (males); 42–70 (55) mm (females)

Weight: 67–116 (80) g (males); 25–80 (54) g (females)

**Identification**

The ermine is a long, slender weasel with a small head and oval ears. The body is light brown with whitish underparts in summer, and pure white in winter. The tail is approximately a third of the total length and has a distinct black tip. Two other species of weasel occur in North America, and in some regions their distributions overlap with that of the ermine. *Mustela erminea* is sometimes mistaken for the larger *M. frenata*, although the two species differ on the basis of size and tail length. *Mustela erminea* is also similar to *M. nivalis*, which is smaller and lacks a black tip on its tail.

inferred from trails and tunnels left in the snow. Although primarily terrestrial, they sometimes swim or climb trees. Ermine populations are dependent on those of their prey, and for that reason their numbers vary where rodent numbers fluctuate from year to year. *Mustela erminea* is itself preyed upon by a number of birds and mammals.

The ermine possesses a coat of fine, soft fur that in summer is light to dark brown on the back and shoulders and whitish or yellow on the belly and throat. In winter, the fur is pure white, although the tail tip remains black year-long. It usually has little fear of humans and readily approaches in search of food, but this courageous little creature cannot easily be tamed. *D. Murray*

**Other Common Names**

Short-tailed weasel, stoat

**Status**

Common, widespread

**Subspecies**

*Mustela erminea alascensis*, mainland of Alaskan Panhandle

*Mustela erminea anguinae*, Vancouver Island, British Columbia

*Mustela erminea artica*, northern Canada and Alaska

*Mustela erminea bangsi*, western Great Lakes, North Dakota, Iowa

*Mustela erminea celenda*, Prince of Wales Island, Alaska

*Mustela erminea cicognanii*, southern Quebec and Ontario, northeastern United States

*Mustela erminea fallenda*, southwestern British Columbia

*Mustela erminea gulosa*, eastern Oregon and Washington

*Mustela erminea haidarum*, Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia

*Mustela erminea initis*, Baranof Island, Alaska

*Mustela erminea invicta*, Idaho, Montana, Alberta

*Mustela erminea kadiacensis*, Kodiak Island, Alaska

*Mustela erminea muricus*, northern California, Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming

*Mustela erminea olympica*, Olympic Mountains, Washington

*Mustela erminea polaris*, northwestern Greenland

*Mustela erminea richardsonii*, Newfoundland to British Columbia

*Mustela erminea salva*, Admiralty Island, Alaska

*Mustela erminea seclusa*, Suemez Island, Alaska

*Mustela erminea semplei*, northwestern Hudson's Bay

**References**

*Mammalian Species* 195; Banfield, 1974

**Long-tailed weasel | *Mustela frenata***

The long-tailed weasel has the largest range of any mustelid in the Western Hemisphere. It inhabits all life zones, from alpine to tropical, except desert areas of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. It is found in a wide variety of habitats, but usually near water. Favored habitats include brushland and open timber, brushy and grassy field edges, grasslands along creeks and lakes, swamps, and cattail marshes. *M. frenata* is usually most abundant in late seral stages or eco-

tones where prey diversity is greatest. Dens are located in dense brushy vegetation in or around dry creeks and drainage ravines. Waterways are a natural avenue for dispersal, particularly in areas that otherwise are unsuitable.

Typical of weasels, the long-tailed weasel has a long, thin body, short legs, a long neck, and a flattened, triangular head. The ears are rounded and there are long vibrissae. The fur is short and soft, and during summer is a rich brown on the back