

Wildlife of Connecticut

By
Shelby Z. Irwin

Connecticut Now and Then Teachers Institute

Funded By:

Connecticut
Humanities
Council

Yale Peabody Museum • Education Department • (203) 432-3775
peabody.education@yale.edu • www.peabody.yale.edu

This publication may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, for commercial purposes in any printed, electronic or other form without the written permission of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University. Limited permission is granted to reproduce portions of this work for educational use in the context of classroom instruction only.

© 2005 Peabody Museum of Natural History, Yale University. All rights reserved.

GOAL

For students to consider the Connecticut climate and landscape in determining what type of wildlife do and do not inhabit the state

OBJECTIVE

Students will be able to determine if an animal could/does live in Connecticut based on that animal's habitat needs and the climate, vegetation, and landscape of Connecticut

CONNECTICUT STANDARD

Grade 3: Habitats. Content standards 3.3 (organisms can survive and reproduce only in environments that meet their basic needs) and 3.4 (all animals depend on plants. Some animals eat plants and others eat the animals that eat plants)

Note: Before beginning this lesson, students will first determine the common needs of people, pets and wildlife (food, water, shelter, and space in which to live – in the quality and quantity required by the animals and in a suitable arrangement). Once they identify the common needs they will identify the arrangement and presentation of these needs as one's habitat (or home). This will be accomplished through the presentation of three lessons (The Beautiful Basics, Everybody Needs a Home, and What's That, Habitat?) from Project Wild, a publication of the US Department of Environmental Protection available at <http://www.projectwild.org/>.

NARRATIVE

Connecticut is divided into four sections, known as the eastern highlands (or uplands), the western highlands (or uplands), the Connecticut Valley lowlands and the coastal plains along Long Island Sound. These four regions include rolling hills, forests and forest edges, fields, freshwater wetlands, coastal salt marshes, and a large river system. The average annual precipitation (rainfall and snowfall) is between 44 and 54 inches.

MATERIALS

Wildlife fact cards, outline maps of Connecticut for listing the climate, landscape and vegetation of the state (a topographical map or a map divided into the four sections may also be used) – either one per student or one per group, a chart-sized map of Connecticut or an overhead of the student outline map.

ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to define “habitat” and the features of a habitat (food, water, shelter, and space in the quality and quantity needed to support life).
2. Present students with a copy of the blank map of Connecticut (either one per student or one per group depending on your preference). Discuss the climate, geography and vegetation of the state, listing facts on the chart-sized blank state map or on an overhead of the student map. Have students list these features inside their map handouts, making sure that the various habitats of the state from the narrative above make it on the list, even if the students do not generate these items themselves.

3. Ask students what kinds of wildlife they think live in Connecticut, allowing them to share any experiences they have had with wildlife and adding information to the blank maps as needed. Do not tell students whether their thoughts about what wildlife live in Connecticut are correct (as you may give hints about the activity).

4. Tell students that they will work in groups with some animal fact sheets and their list of Connecticut land features. Using the fact sheets and what they know about the climate, vegetation and geography of our state they must decide whether each of the animals does, or could, live here.

5. Organize students into small groups and give them 20-25 minutes to group the animal cards into animals that live in Connecticut and animals that do not. Note – some students may need help with some vocabulary on the cards.

6. Go through the animals one by one and have groups explain whether or not they think the animals live in Connecticut, giving an explanation for their beliefs.

7. Discuss other facts they notice, such as that males are generally larger than females, which animals may be prey for other animals, that all of the animals are mammals, or that larger mammals do not tend to live in Connecticut.

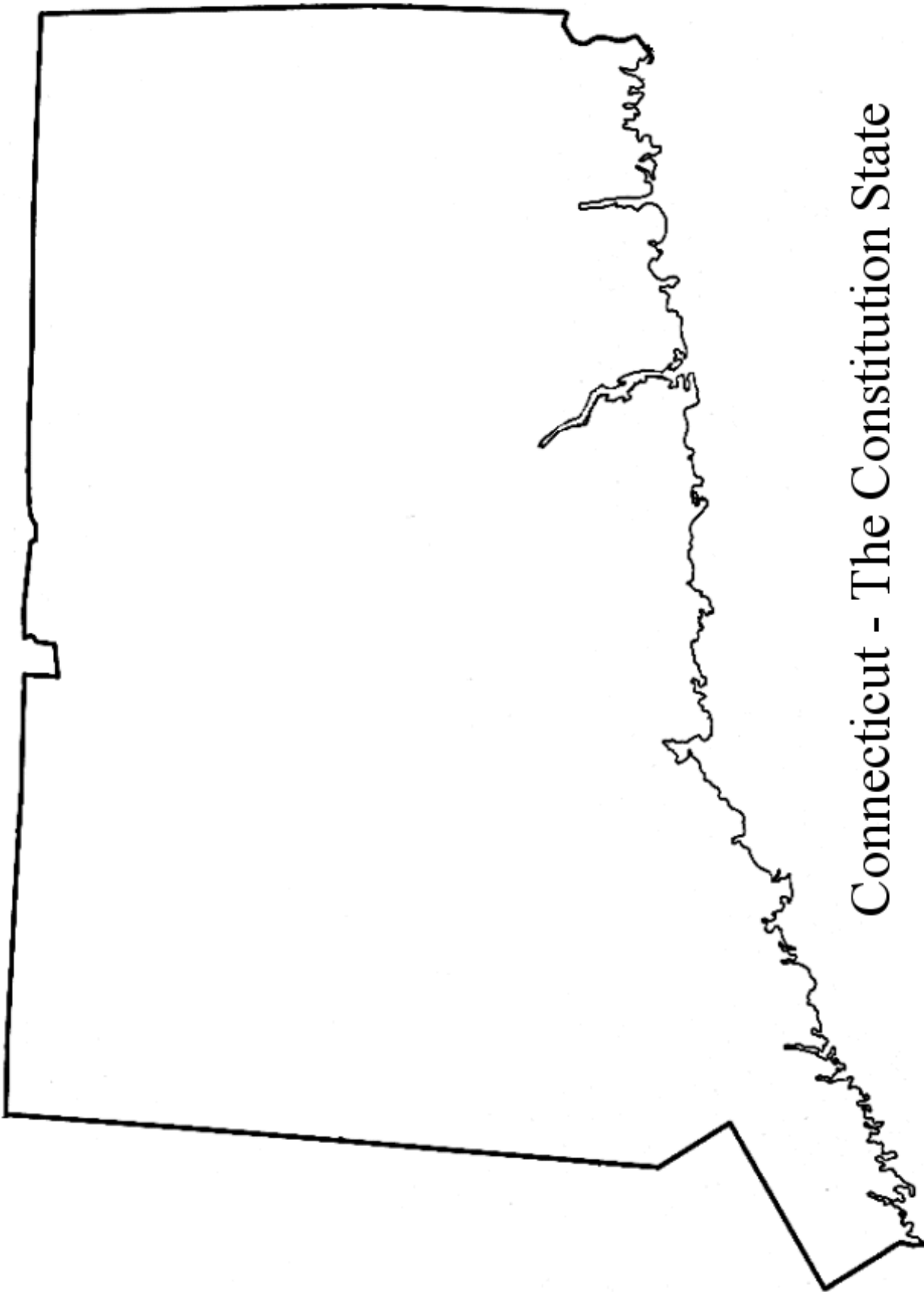
POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS

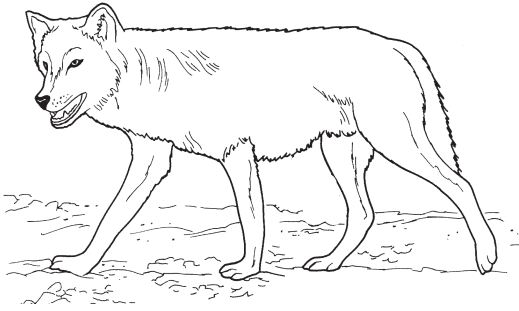
Using the heights and lengths of each animal students could create a life-sized or scaled mural of the wildlife of Connecticut.

- Students could also do an intensive study of one Connecticut animal by reading the full fact sheet available at the DEP website.
- You could study the vegetation and land features of Connecticut's four regions more intensely and then have students determine which areas of the state the animals likely reside in.
- You could repeat this lesson with birds or fish.
- You could have students study the wildlife of different regions of the world.

RESOURCES

- The introductory lessons that precede this lesson were taken from *Project Wild K-12 Activity Guide* available at <http://www.projectwild.org/>.
- The blank Connecticut map is from http://www.netstate.com/states/maps/ct_maps.htm.
- Information about the Connecticut geography and landscape was culled from *The Face of Connecticut* by Michael Bell, available at http://www.tmsc.org/face_of_ct/index.html, and the Partners for Fish and Wildlife website at <http://partners.fws.gov/pdfs/CT-needs.pdf>.
- The Connecticut animal information card facts and images are from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection website at <http://dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/wildlife/learn/isfact.htm>.
- Sloth photos and facts are from <http://slothsonline.com/slothpict.html>
- Drawings of the camel and hippopotamus were taken from <http://www.sru.edu/depts/cisba/comp-sci/dailey/public/mammals/mammals.html>. These images are originally from the Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language, published in 1911.
- Some sloth, camel and hippopotamus facts are from the *Scholastic Encyclopedia of Animals* by Laurence Pringle.





Coyotes eat mice, white-tailed deer, woodchucks, and rabbits. Adult coyotes weigh between 25 and 40 pounds, with males generally weighing more than females. They are about 4 feet long from nose to tail. They live in many different environments, including brushy fields, farmlands, and the edges of wetlands. They can be found in rural and suburban settings. Although adult coyotes can dig their own dens, they usually enlarge an abandoned woodchuck or fox burrow.

Woodchucks eat plants such as clover, alfalfa, garden vegetables and grasses. They will also eat tree leaves, buds and fruits. They weigh between 5 and 10 pounds and are between 16 and 20 inches tall with a 6 inch tail. Males usually weigh more than females. They live in forest edges and fields. Woodchucks dig burrow systems. Most burrows are 25 to 30 feet long and from two to five feet deep, with at least two entrances. The main entrance is often the most visible, with a large mound of freshly dug dirt nearby. The other, less visible entrances are used for escape purposes.



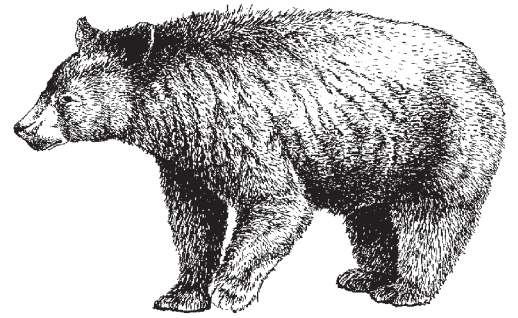
Moose live in forests and eat buds, twigs and leaves from a variety of shrubs and trees, including birch, maple and cherry. In the spring and summer, moose may be found looking for aquatic (or water) plants in wetlands. Moose are very large animals. An adult moose can stand over 6 feet tall. Females (called cows) weigh about 750 pounds while males (called bulls) weigh about 1,000 pounds. Adult males have antlers that they shed every year.



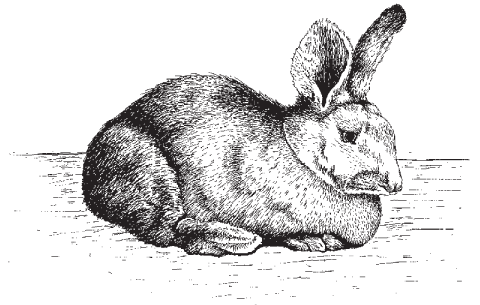
The white-tailed deer have a tail that is brown on top and white underneath. When they are frightened they raise up their tail and the white underside can be seen. They live in fields, forest edges, and woodlands. In the spring and summer they eat grass; in the fall they eat acorns and apples; and in the winter they eat twigs and buds from hardwood trees and leaves from white pine and hemlock trees. Adult males weigh about 150 pounds and have branching antlers that they grow and shed every year. Adult females weigh about 110 pounds. They are usually about 5-6 feet tall.

Bobcats live in forests and rock ledges; they prefer brushy and rocky woodlands broken by fields. Bobcats are about twice the size of housecats. Adult males can weigh up to 40 pounds and are up to 3 feet long. Adult females weigh up to 33 pounds and are up to 2 feet long. They eat medium-sized animals such as rabbits, woodchucks, squirrels, and chipmunks. Bobcats sometimes kill their prey and then store it for later consumption. They live in a den lined with dry leaves, moss or grass. The same den site may be used for several years in a row. Bobcats are less adaptable to humans than other wildlife species, so they can be pushed out when human populations leave little forested land for them to live on.

The black bear has short, thick legs. It is the smallest North American bear. Adult males, or boars, normally weigh from 150 to 400 pounds, while females, or sows, weigh from 110 to 200 pounds. Adults are five to six feet long. Black bear habitat is forestland, usually with deciduous and coniferous trees, as well as streams, swamps and rock ledges. Bears prefer areas with thick, low-lying vegetation and abundant food resources. Wetlands are particularly important in spring when budding plants are one of the few available foods. Bears eat grasses, fruits, nuts and berries. They occasionally will prey on small mammals, deer and livestock. Bears will also seek insects (particularly ants and bees), and eat from bird feeders and garbage cans.



The cottontail rabbit lives at the edges of open fields and meadows, areas of dense high grass, forest edges, and the borders of marshy areas. They weigh 2-3 pounds and are between 14 and 18 inches long, with the males generally being larger than the females. In the summer they eat tender grasses and herbs; crops such as peas, beans, and lettuce are also eaten. In winter, bark, twigs, and buds of shrubs and young trees are eaten. During the day they stay hidden in dense brush, protected from predators and harsh weather. In times of extreme weather conditions, or to escape predators, rabbits will jump in an abandoned woodchuck burrow for protection.



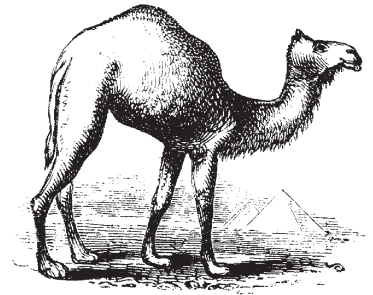
The gray squirrel prefers upland hardwood forests but is often seen in urban parks and yards. It weighs 1 to 1.5 pounds and is 16 to 21 inches long. Gray squirrels eat acorns, hickory nuts, beechnuts and butternuts, along with berries, mushrooms, maple seeds, and some field crops such as corn. These tree-dwelling rodents are great climbers and jumpers. They have excellent sight, smell, and hearing. The gray squirrel is active year-round but needs tree cavities for shelter during harsh weather. In the fall, gray squirrels gather and bury a winter food supply. This food supply is usually recovered as needed, by sniffing the ground until a buried nut is found.



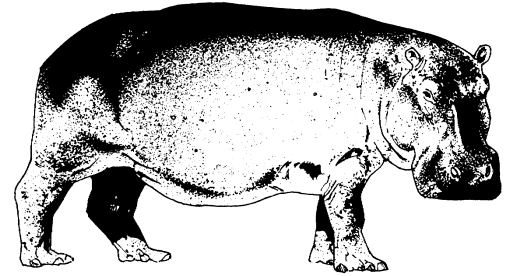
The sloth lives in the rain forest, where the trees are thick enough to form a canopy and the weather never gets too hot or too cold. They spend most of their time upside down in the trees. They eat, sleep, and even have babies upside down. They very rarely step on land, and when they do they move very slowly. In fact, they are the earth's slowest-moving mammal. They eat leaves, buds and twigs, especially from the cecropia tree. However, they move so slowly that they don't need much food. They are about two feet long and weigh 9-10 pounds.



Camels are well prepared for sandy, dry desert life. They have wide, padded feet that don't sink into the sand, special eyelids that protect their eyes from windblown sand, and they can go many days without water. Once they reach water, they can drink 50 gallons in one day! They eat grasses and leaves from bushes and trees. When food is scarce, the camel lives off of fat stored in its humps. Camels weigh 1,000 to 1,500 pounds. They are about 10 feet long and 6 to 7 feet tall.



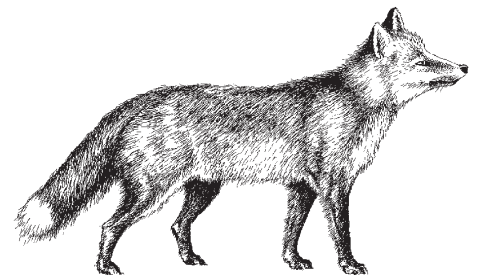
The hippopotamus lives in the water and along the water's edge. They prefer rivers with deep water and nearby reed beds and grasslands because they eat up to 100 pounds of grass a day! Adult male hippos weigh about 5,000 pounds and adult females weigh about 4,000 pounds. They are about 12 feet long and 4 to 5 feet tall. Hippos can hold their breath under water for up to five minutes. They spend their days in the water or sleeping on the beach. Although hippos only eat plants, they are very dangerous. They sometimes kill lions and crocodiles with their razor-sharp teeth to defend themselves and their young.



The striped skunk lives in fields, wooded ravines and rocky outcrops. They may also be found under buildings and near garbage dumps. They weigh 6 to 14 pounds and are 21 to 26 inches long. Males are somewhat larger than females. They eat insects (especially grubs), earthworms, snails, grains, nuts, fruits, reptiles, vegetation, amphibians, birds, eggs and garbage. Skunks are mostly nocturnal, although they are occasionally active during the day. They usually spend the daylight hours sleeping in their underground burrows. Skunks may dig their own burrows, but they prefer to use natural cavities among rocks, or under stone walls, logs or buildings. They will often use abandoned woodchuck burrows. The skunk sprays a bad odor to defend itself. Skunks are mild-natured and only spray when provoked.



The red fox lives in a mixture of forest and open fields, and particularly likes the edge between the two areas. Suburban and urban areas are commonly inhabited by red foxes. Their weight ranges from 8 to 15 pounds, and 10 to 11 pounds is average. They are 39 to 43 inches long. Males are slightly heavier and larger than females. They eat mice, woodchucks, rabbits, chipmunks, fruits, insects, birds and eggs, garbage, amphibians, and reptiles. It is not unusual to see a red fox during the daytime. The red fox may partially bury, or cache, extra food covering it with soil, grass, leaves, or snow.



The beaver is the largest rodent found in North America. Adults can weigh anywhere between 30 to 65 pounds and measure from 24 to 36 inches, plus a tail of 12 to 18 inches. Beavers can be found inhabiting rivers, streams, lakes, farm ponds, swamps and other wetland areas. They feed on the leaves, shoots, twigs, roots and outer bark of trees and shrubs. A variety of aquatic plants, like water lilies and pond weeds, and other plants, like sedges and grasses, are consumed during summer. With its webbed hind feet with clawed toes, rich brown fur (which is both waterproof and insulating) and paddle-shaped, hairless tail, the beaver is well-adapted to living in a semi-aquatic environment. Beavers build dams, which allows them to change the habitat to meet their needs. By cutting sticks and branches and shoving them into the stream bottom and then piling mud on top, beavers are able to dam a stream and create a pond. This provides beavers access to food and protection from predators. They build a dome-shaped lodge out of sticks and mud. The lodge contains a dry inside chamber which provides cover.

