

A GUIDE TO IDENTIFYING SWIMMING SEMI-AQUATIC MAMMALS



Beaver? Otter? Muskrat? Mink? Nutria? While these semi-aquatic mammals are generally easily identifiable on land, in the water they are frequently confused! They all play different roles in our watersheds, but only beavers are ecosystem engineers and keystone species, supporting so many others with their habitat building.



Here are some tips on identifying these different species while they are swimming.

BEAVER



- May see entire body or may just see triangle of head
- Ears protrude from head more than muskrat
- Often seen swimming with branches in its mouth, or eating inner bark
- Distinctive wide, flat tail. May be used to smack water to scare away predators

OTTER



- Generally swim with just head and neck out of water
- Round face with prominent nose
- Sometimes dive like porpoises, especially when moving fast
- Tend to travel in groups
- Eating fish is a telltale sign

MUSKRAT



- Much smaller than a beaver or otter
- Ears don't protrude
- Swim with most of body length visible and float higher in the water than beaver
- Head is larger proportionally to body than beaver
- Laterally flattened, hairless tail, like a rat

MINK



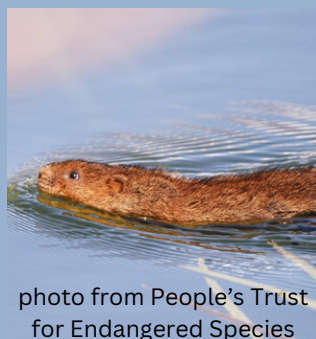
- Similar to an otter, has an athletic build and long body, with a small head. Both otters and mink are members of the weasel family
- Dark brown fur
- Furry tail
- If it's eating a fish, insect, or small mammal it's a mink. With the exception of otter, all other species are herbivores

NUTRIA



- Tend to ride higher in the water than beaver and have a more arched back
- Face is rounded towards nose like a horse, whereas beaver's face is more concave like a bear
- Skinny, round, sparsely haired, rat-like tails
- Nutria's whiskers are more prominent, dense, and typically very gray in comparison to beavers

WATER SHREWS/VOLES



- Much smaller than other animals depicted here
- Look like semi-aquatic mice
- Both are rare to spot
- Both have hairless tails
- Water shrews have long snout
- Water voles are fluffier