

August 2008

Creature Feature

Least Weasel

The least weasel is the smallest member of the weasel family. Like most members of its family it is a strict carnivore, preying on small mammals, amphibians, birds, and insects. Weighing in at only 1-2 ounces (the weight of 5-10 quarters) the least weasel sometimes hunts prey as heavy as itself. At only 1 inch in diameter, it is able to make its nest in the tunnels of its prey.

These weasels can be found in old fields, riparian edges, open woodlands, and sometimes mature forests. Females will use a home range of 2-10 acres while males roam more widely, maintaining a range of 17-37 acres.



Least weasels are unique in the weasel family because they breed two or three times a year. The young reach adult size in 3 months and are able to reproduce when they are between 4 and 8 months old. Although fierce predators themselves, least weasels fall prey to long-tailed weasels, gray fox, red fox, snakes, hawks, owls, and house cats.

Nature Notes

The largest member of the weasel family at the Nature Center is the **River Otter**.



Last winter we were able to see tracks and slides on the frozen river outside the River Overlook and the Oxbow. This summer check the banks around the rivers, ponds, and the oxbow for evidence of these playful predators.

Late summer is breeding season for many members of the weasel family. Once the weasels have mated, the embryos of many species experience a developmental delay. The development of the offspring stops for several months and then re-starts in spring based on day length cues. Most weasels are born in April and May.



Mother mink moving her kit.

Visit the Information Desk for program information.