

Natural Illinois: Mammals



You don't have to go to exotic places to find interesting plants and animals to study at home or in the classroom! Illinois wildlife is as close as your local park or schoolyard. Look carefully and you may see squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, or field mice—or the tracks they leave behind. Explore the world of mammals with children. (See *Illinois Early Learning and Development Benchmarks 3.A.ECa, 3.A.ECb, 8.A.ECa, 12.A.ECa, 12.B.ECa, and 13.B.ECb.*)

Collect classroom resources.

- Ask a librarian to help you find children's nonfiction books and nature magazines with colorful illustrations of mammals.
- Order *Illinois Wild Mammals, Furbearers* and *Habitats Are Homes* posters from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Find details and an order form on its Web site at <http://dnr.state.il.us/teachkids/>. Borrow an IDNR "Illinois Wild Mammals Trunk," which contains books, posters, animal pelts, and more. For details, see <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/education/Pages/mammalstrunk.aspx>

Find out about mammals with the children.

- Observe and talk about live mammals you have seen, such as squirrels, rabbits, dogs, or cats. Help the children to discover that most mammals have four limbs and hair or fur. Warn children not to touch wild animals—or any animal—without adult permission. You can ask, "Who has petted a dog or cat? Are they warm to touch?"
- Provide sketching materials or a camera for children to record mammal sightings.
- Note that most baby mammals are born live rather than hatching from eggs.
- Make a topic web or a list of the children's ideas and questions about mammals.
- Invite a local expert to answer their questions about mammals. A nature center may be able to help. Help children practice their questions before the visit.

Sort mammals into domestic and wild.

- Introduce the word *domestic* to describe animals that depend on people for their food and often live with or close to people. Ask the children whether the mammals they have observed or seen in books are domestic or wild. Help children make a chart with columns to list mammals as domestic or wild.
- Encourage children to use their own observations, the IDNR poster *Habitats Are Homes*, or books to discover where different mammals live, such as in wooded areas, grass, water, or in a house with people. Introduce the word *habitat* and add a habitat column to your chart.

Draw a simple map.

- Help children use a large piece of paper to draw a map with areas of water, trees, grass, a house, and a barn. Provide or make small animal figures that can be put into the correct habitat for each animal.
- Discuss where the children might see wild mammals not usually found in Illinois. Let children add a zoo area to their map for these wild mammals.

For related Web resources, see "Natural Illinois: Mammals" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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