



BCT Stewardship Journal: May 2024

Species Spotlight: Fisher (*Pekania pennanti*)

A fisher, sometimes called a fisher cat, even though they are not a feline and do not hunt for fish, is a large species in the Mustelid or weasel family. Found only in North America, they are typically a seldom seen mammal, but we have heard about several sightings reported on Cape Cod, including here in Brewster.

Fishers are elusive, solitary creatures, who are primarily active during dawn and dusk in the summer and during the day in the winter. Fishers have dark brown fur, rounded close-set ears, a pointed face, and their bushy tails can make up one-third of their body size. The males are significantly larger than the females; males can be up to sixteen pounds and three feet long, while females weigh up to six pounds and grow up to two feet in length. Females will give birth to an average of three babies at a time, and their young will stay with them in a den in a tree cavity, usually at the tree-top level. This hidden den protects them from other predators and male fishers. Their primary food source is rodents and other small animals, but they will consume berries, carrion, and even the occasional chicken or small domestic pet. Dense forests are the ideal habitat for these stealth creatures. While they are agile, swift and excellent climbers, with sharp, retractable claws most of their hunting is on the ground. Fishers are also the only known predators of porcupines!

Once hunted for their pelts, conservation and protection measures have allowed the species to rebound. No doubt accounting for the reason we are hearing about more sightings. While they have been seen all over town, some locations in Brewster where you may chance coming across one of these mysterious mammals are the Punkhorn Parklands, Long Pond Woodlands, or the Freemans South Aquifer trails. Unfortunately, fishers have quite the reputation for being aggressive and having "blood-curdling" screams. However, fishers pose an extremely low threat to humans. They will attack if they feel threatened or cornered, but often just scurry off and climb a tree. Also remember if you are out walking with your dog to keep them on a leash to avoid a potentially dangerous interaction with any wildlife you may encounter. If you do feel threatened by one, you can yell, make noise, or shine bright lights. Most likely, the fishers will remain mostly hidden from human sight if we continue to protect their habitats through land conservation.



Image of a fisher showing off their climbing skills. Photo credit to Massachusetts Audubon Society.