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# Natural History Notes

MIKE DOMBECK grew up in the Moose Lake area and graduated from Hayward High School and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He has a B.S. degree in Biology and an M.S. degree in Aquatic Biology. He has taught Zoology at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and is presently a staff member of the University of Minnesota's Bell Museum of Natural History. Mike has also been an area fishing guide since his high school days.



## THE MASKED BANDIT



6 to 20 in. (or more)

Raccoon

Mating occurs in March or April and two to eight young are born 63 days later. The young are born blind and their eyes open 19 days later. They suckle for about two months and remain in the family circle through their first winter until a new litter forces them out. By October the young of the year may weigh up to 18 pounds.

The raccoon is not a true hibernator but goes into a state of dormancy in the late fall much like its close relative, the bear. They prefer hollow trees or underground holes for their dens and remain there till the warm days of late winter or early spring. Pregnant females continue to use their dens to raise the young. Raccoons may burn up as much as 15 pounds of fat while in a state of dormancy even though the body functions are slowed throughout the winter.

A raccoon's home range may cover a radius of five to seven miles. They are often heavily parasitized by ticks, mites, and fleas. Both canine and feline distemper may take heavy tolls, reducing their numbers, especially during years of dense populations.

The raccoon can be a vicious fighter when cornered, so treat him with respect at a distance. Remember to keep a secure lock on your minnow bucket, worm containers, garbage cans, and keep a watchful eye on your sweetcorn patch. For when you least expect it, our pixy-like, ringtailed friends will make the raid.



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