

Welcome Teachers!

This packet has been designed to allow you to bring excitement, curiosity and hands-on learning to your students! On the following pages you will find a fact sheet related directly to an animal biofact (fur, feathers, bones...) that you have in your teacher pack. Some of the biofacts are from animals that you may see on your journey, some are from other interesting prairie animals, many that you may see in your own back yard!

Use the facts in this packet and biofacts in your teacher pack to give your students an enriching and hands-on experience. We ask that the materials are treated with respect and integrity, but encourage your students to touch, inquire and, of course, learn!

Contents of the 1st/2nd grade teacher pack:

Bald eagle – skull, egg, foot (all replica) and photo

Prairie dog – skull and photo

Coyote – claw and photo

Bobcat – claw and photo

Whitetail deer – skull with antlers and photo

Prairie predators – plaque of footprints

Track rubbing plates – 16 plates of various animals

Biofact(s) – Bald eagle skull, egg and foot and photo

Description:

- The bald eagle is a large bird of prey with dark contour and flight feathers, and in mature birds a white feathered head.
 - Immature bald eagles have a dark feathered head that turns to white in their fourth or fifth year.
- The beak, legs and eyes of the mature bald eagle are yellow in color. Until about four to five years of age the beak, legs and feet are dark in color.
- The toes of the bald eagle end in sharp powerful talons that aid in the catching of slimy fish.
 - The feet of the bald eagle are rough; this too aids in the catching and gripping of fish.
- The bald eagle is an apt flier, but often relies on wind currents to carry it through the sky. This behavior allows the eagle to conserve energy and remain in the skies longer.
- Females are generally larger than males and have a slightly longer wing span.

Range and Habitats:

- Historically the bald eagle could be found in all of the 48 contiguous states, Alaska and Canada. Throughout this range, the eagles are normally found near water such as rivers, large lakes or oceans.
- Populations were greatly reduced due to the use of certain pesticides, illegal hunting and habitat destruction. Seeing a bald eagle in the lower 48 states became a rare occurrence.
 - Bald eagles were an endangered species in the lower 48 states until 1995, when through massive conservation efforts it was down listed to a threatened species.
 - Bald eagle populations in Alaska remained strong throughout the endangerment in the lower 48 states.
- While the bald eagle has made a significant comeback, threats like habitat destruction remain real and pressing.

Diet:

- Bald eagles feed primarily on fish, but their diet also consists of small mammals, waterfowl, carrion and the occasional reptile.
- Bald eagles will steal food from other eagles, and sometimes even other species of birds of prey.

Bald Eagle Fun Facts:

- ❖ Benjamin Franklin protested the bald eagle becoming the national bird because of its habit of stealing food from others.

- ❖ The bald eagle got its name from the old English word balde, meaning white because of the white feathers on its head.

Biofact(s) – Prairie dog skull, photo

Description:

- The prairie dog is a small ground squirrel, a member of the rodent family.
- The colloquial name of prairie dog is due to the sounds that the animal makes when communicating - short, sharp yips and barks.
- Prairie dog coloration is well adapted to life on the prairie. The golden brown fur blends in well with the soil and grasses of the short grass prairie.
- The species of prairie dog that occurs in Kansas is the black tailed prairie dog. As the name implies, the tail of this species has a black tip.

Range and Habitats:

- Prairie dogs historically have ranged throughout the North American short grass prairie.
 - Currently prairie dogs are found sporadically in the short grass prairie
- The preferred habitat of the black tailed prairie dog is short grass prairie.
 - It is proposed that prairie dogs prefer this habitat because the short grasses allow for more visibility.

Diet:

- The preferred food of the prairie dog is forbs or flowering plants, prairie grasses and weeds.
- The prairie dog is an herbivore that occasionally eats an insect in the course of eating their preferred grasses.

Prairie Dog Fun Facts:

- ❖ Prairie dogs do not hibernate, but often take long winters naps! During extremely cold or cloudy weather the prairie dog will remain in its burrow, tucked away from the elements.
- ❖ Like all rodents, the prairie dog has incisors (front teeth) that never stop growing. In order to keep the teeth at the proper level, rodents must continually use the teeth or gnaw on a semi hard to hard surface. Biting off its preferred foods helps the prairie dog's teeth remain in good order.
- ❖ Many people consider the prairie dog a nuisance species, eating grass that cattle could eat and making holes that cattle may step in. Cattle and prairie dogs can co-exist with proper land management and range management techniques.

Biofact(s) – Coyote claw and photo

Description:

- Coyotes are small wild canines with color ranging from grayish brown to yellowish brown on the upper body fading to tawny on the underside.
- The coyote has a bottle-shaped tail that is usually tipped with black or darker fur.
 - Two ways to distinguish a coyote from a domestic dog are; the coyote has erect pointed ears, and when running the coyote holds its tail level with or below the back.
- Adult coyotes weigh from 25-30lbs.

Range and Habitats:

- The coyote is found throughout North and Central America.
- The coyote is a generalist and is well-adapted to most landscapes. The most important limiting factor for coyotes is the presence or absence of wolves. Coyote numbers are restricted in areas with wolves.

Diet:

- The diet of the coyote consists of 90% mammalian protein in the form of rodents and rabbits. The other 10% of its diet consists of birds, reptiles, amphibians and plant matter.
- The coyote is opportunistic and will eat whatever it can; garbage and pet food are staples in the diet of urban coyotes.

Coyote Fun Facts:

- ❖ The coyote can run at speeds of 35-40 miles per hour.
- ❖ A testament to the adaptability of the coyote is that it can even utilize the harsh habitat of Death Valley, one of the harshest habitats in North America.
- ❖ The coyote is a very strong swimmer, and has colonized an island close to Massachusetts.
- ❖ The coyote got its wily reputation because of its intelligence and ability to adapt to situations and become successful.
- ❖ An interesting hunting strategy has been observed among coyotes. One coyote will jump around wildly near a flock of birds to distract them, while a second coyote will sneak up and grab an unsuspecting bird for lunch!

Biofact(s) – Bobcat claw and photo

Description:

- The bobcat is a small wild cat that can be found throughout the North American prairie.
- The bobcat got its name due to its short stumpy tail. It appears to have been bobbed, or cut off.
- It has a tawny coat with various speckles and streaks of color ranging from light brown to black. This coat makes for excellent camouflage on the prairie.
 - The bobcat needs camouflage in order to sneak up on prey, as well as to avoid encounters with other animals and humans.
- The skull of the bobcat is loaded with 28 teeth.
 - They are equipped with four sharp canine teeth that they use to clamp onto prey so that it cannot escape.

Range and Habitats:

- Historically the bobcat's range is all the lower 48 United States, north into Canada and south into Mexico.
 - Bobcats can adapt to many habitats as well as to humans, allowing for such diversity in range.
- The preferred habitats of the bobcat are forests, semi-deserts, mountains, and transitions between forest and prairie.

Diet:

- Bobcats are carnivores.
 - They are stealthy hunters; they stalk their prey, then pounce and kill with a bite to the vertebrae of the neck.
 - Bobcats hunt rodents, rabbits, deer, large ground birds, and sometimes reptiles.
 - Though rare, they are known to eat small domesticated animals and poultry when other game is in short supply.

Bobcat Fun Facts:

- ❖ The bobcat is the most abundant cat in North America.
- ❖ The bobcat has the greatest range (distribution) of all of the North American cats.
- ❖ The bobcat can pounce over ten feet in distance!

Biofact(s) – Whitetail deer skull with antler, photo

Description:

- The whitetail deer has tawny fur, with the underside being lighter and the underside of the tail being white.
- Males have antlers, females do not.
 - The antlers aid in breeding and courtship. Females are attracted to larger antlers and males can use them to battle for the right to mate with a female.
- Fawns have a speckled, dappled effect on their fur to allow them to be camouflaged.
 - Fawns will lie very still on the forest floor; with their dappling they look like patches of soil with sunlight on them.

Range and Habitats:

- Whitetail deer can be found all over the United States (except for a few states in the west) south into Central America, and north into southern Canada.
- Whitetail deer prefer habitat that has dense stands of woods to hide and shelter in, along with transition areas that provide food.

Diet:

- The whitetail deer is an herbivore.
- The food habits of the whitetail deer vary with the habitat. Eastern deer populations eat different plants than western populations.
 - All deer populations eat leaves, plants, shoots and bark.

Whitetail Deer Fun Facts:

- ❖ Whitetail deer use their tail as a warning flag to others. When fleeing or sensing danger the deer puts its tail up in the air, exposing the white underside. This alerts other deer in the area that perceived danger is near.
- ❖ The whitetail deer boasts a nose that is 100 times more sensitive than our own!
- ❖ Deer are excellent jumpers; they can “broad jump” up to thirty feet, and jump a nine-foot tall fence in a single bound.
- ❖ Deer don’t have the best table manners; they gulp down food with little or no chewing. Later they regurgitate the food and chew it better. This behavior allows them to feed quickly and return to safety for chewing and digesting!

Biofact(s) –Track rubbing plates

The animals of the prairie are well camouflaged and well adapted to stay out of the sight of humans. Humans are viewed as a threat to wild animals, and they go out of their way to stay out of our way. Field scientists who study wild animals often have to rely on signs left by the animals to determine things like their size, health and direction and speed of travel. Some signs that scientists study are tracks, scat, bedding material and food scraps.

Tracks are an especially good indicator of animal species, size, direction of travel, if any, and speed. People who study tracks and traces left by animals are called ichnologists. Invite your students to become ichnologists and make their own track rubbings!

Instructions for use of track rubbing plates:

Materials:

Track rubbing plates

Paper (reusable office paper has been provided to you in your teacher pack)

Pencil or crayon

Place track rubbing plate face up on a flat surface. Place a piece of paper over the plate and rub gently with the side of the pencil lead or crayon. Encourage students to label their rubbings; identification labels can be found on the back of each plate. If for some reason you notice a plate without a label please report it to the education department so that it can be replaced.