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The Life of a Porcupine

The fox crept through the snow, its pelt dappled white from the falling snowflakes. It was hungry. Stopping, the fox put its nose to the air. It smelled something, something to eat. After walking for a short time, the fox came to a den and waited. Soon, a stocky rodent emerged from the burrow; a porcupine. The porcupine didn't have time to react as the fox leaped on top of it, but the fox quickly regretted that move as two quills were now painfully lodged in its paw. The fox fled the scene as it would now be an easier meal for its predators. Shaking itself, the porcupine got up and went to find food. She did not bother to check for danger, for her almost foolproof method of defense had not failed her yet.

Porcupines are fascinating creatures, with many different species, and this article will be narrowed down to the North American porcupines. Here is a bit of basic information about North American porcupines. North American porcupines are not unlike other porcupines, large stocky rodents about the size of a striped skunk with short legs, their back and tails covered with barbed quills. The lifespan of a North American porcupine is 5-10 years, weighing from a range of 7-30 pounds. Mating season is Oct-Nov, and offspring are born in May or June, the offspring feeds itself 1

week after being born and leaves its mother in Autumn. These are basic facts about the North American porcupine, and what follows is how they got this way.

The porcupine evolution is a confusing topic, since humans weren't alive then, or at least they didn't record history then, but humans do make their best guess as to how rodents evolved. The Hystricognaths (the rodent family) started to evolve about 40 million years ago. Porcupines probably came from the Giant Hutia, a creature as big as a black bear weighing 110-440 pounds. Slowly there was a mutation that made the soft keratin hairs grow to have hard keratin plates around them, this gene was passed down for better chance of survival. This is how porcupines evolved, and now their quills help them as a defense.

A common thing to know about a porcupine is its quills, this animal's most interesting feature. Knowing about the quills is important, but knowing what they do is even more important. The barbed quills on the porcupine's skin are loosely attached, when a predator comes porcupines raise their quills making them look threatening. Since the quills are loosely attached, if a predator attempts an attack and applies pressure, the quills easily come off the porcupine's skin. Barbs are useful once the quill is ripped free, since the barbs are pointing downward it's easy to get them in the enemy's flesh, however, to the enemy's disadvantage, when being pulled out the barbs catch on

the inside of the skin. Now this may be how a porcupine protects itself from being food, but what is it's food?

Like all animals porcupines, need to eat. Being year round animals, they must also have a food supply during winter. Porcupines are herbivores, so they'll eat pretty much any green plants, tree leaves, and tree buds. Another one of their food sources is soft bark, and the soft layer under the bark. This is a very reliable food source that can be found in winter, although, they sometimes kill the tree from removing too much bark. The last thing food wise is salt. Porcupines love salt, and will eat almost anything with salt in it, such as, canoe paddles and horse saddles. These are porcupines food sources, and at least one can be relied on in winter, but as well as needing a food source in winter they also need a home.

Porcupines, being year round animals, need a home in the winter. Aside from being year round animals, they are also nocturnal meaning they also need a place to sleep during the day. During the day it may sleep under a bush, in some rocks, or hollow log or tree, and if it can be found a burrow. These creatures are normally alone, but in winter they may live together, in order to keep warm. Porcupines will also spend a lot of time in trees, maybe living near or in them because trees provide a great food

source as well as safety from predators. These are possible porcupine homes, whether they need it for shelter, from the cold or sun, or just a place to rest.

This article was all about North American porcupine a fascinating creature of North America. Even though they may not be this animal's more interesting qualities, it eats almost any green plant, loves salt, and sleeps during the day spending time in trees. It's more interesting qualities of, evolution, cartilage modified hairs that form hard quills, and unique method of defense. The porcupine is a truly unique animal, and these are just some of the facts about them.

Works Cited

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