

vince offers courses not available elsewhere, any student in the province may have access to them.

The provision allows for transfer payments from the student's home school, plus a living and travel allowance paid to the school receiving the student.

Upon being made aware of the existence of this provision, Chiriaeff set about winning the enthusiasm of the education department. She then found a school – the Pierre Laporte Secondary School in Montreal – which agreed to set up the proper facilities. The first group of 33 students enrolled in September 1975. A two-year junior college program with credentials for university is being planned for when the original class completes its five-year secondary school course.

The Raccoon

(One of a series from Hinterland Who's Who by the Canadian Wildlife Service.)

The name raccoon comes from the Algonquin word *arakun* meaning "he scratches with his hands".

In Canada the range has been extended northward in recent decades, probably owing to more favourable climatic conditions, and now includes all provinces except Newfoundland (raccoons were introduced to Prince Edward Island). Scattered reports of sightings have come from areas north of the indicated range.

The raccoon is not a great roamer, having a home range of about one square mile. Population densities normally are one animal *per* five acres. The animal is considered to be an inhabitant of the woodland edge, especially hardwoods and is seldom found within extensive forest stands.

Appearance

Undoubtedly the most notable physical characteristics are the raccoon's black facial mask and ringed tail. As many as five to ten black rings may be found on the tail, markings which contrast sharply with the grey colour of this long-furred animal. Black, brown and albino colour phases also occur. The head is broad, though the muzzle is pointed. The toes are not

webbed, in fact the footprints resemble those of a man, and because the front toes can be opened wide, the forepaws can be used as "hands" almost as skilful as those of monkeys. The normal life span is probably from ten to 12 years.

Although capable of trotting like a dog or bounding at speeds of up to 15 miles an hour, the raccoon cannot sustain such speeds for any length of time. Therefore, unless chased by a dog or an irate human, it is unusual to see a raccoon moving along any faster than its characteristic "Sunday shuffle".

Diet

In spring, when the female is providing food for her litter as well as herself, the diet is predominantly animal matter predominantly crayfish. Young muskrats, squirrels, and rabbits, the eggs of ducks, red-winged blackbirds, grouse, pheasant and quail, and marsh invertebrates, e.g. fresh-water clams and giant water beetles, are also consumed.

In summer, as plants are abundant, the raccoon's diet is 70 percent vegetarian. Berries, including strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and blueberries, are eaten along with cherries, plums, peaches, peas, potatoes, and immature corn when available.

The autumn diet is extremely important to the survival of the animal during the Canadian winter. Further south, raccoons are active and feed all winter long, but the more northern animals are forced to spend much of

those long cold and snowy months existing on the store of fat built up by autumn gorging.

Breeding and characteristics

Unlike the ground hog, the raccoon does not truly hibernate in winter but merely becomes inactive. The body temperature does not drop and the animal's activity appears governed by the air temperature. In early winter the raccoon will stay denned up during below freezing temperatures. Such a pattern allows the raccoon to conserve its valuable energy stores (fat) during periods when it is unlikely to find food. However, by the breeding season (January–February) the male raccoon will be up and about seeking a female even in below-zero temperatures providing the snow is not too deep. The males will mate with more than one female. The female will drive off all other males except the one she selects to be her mate, and as she mates with only one male she is called monogamous.

The gestation period averages 63 days and the litter, averaging four and ranging from one to seven furred and blind young, is born in late April to early May. The male gives no assistance in raising the young and may not even be within the spring and summer home range of the female and her young family. The eyes of the young raccoons open about 18-23 days after they are born but by ten days of age they are already sporting the familiar facial mask and colour patterns typical of the species.

Other characteristics of the species include a proclivity for sun-bathing. Although generally most active at night, the raccoon is known to forage during the day also. However, one is more likely to see the animal sunning itself in a tree during bright warm weather.

The animal is subject to canine distemper, meningitis and rabies, although the latter is often confused with encephalities which has similar symptoms.

As the raccoon can be easily tamed when young, many people have had their lives enriched by close association with this intelligent, inquisitive animal. It is one of the few wild creatures which appears capable of making the adjustment from family pet back to the wild.

