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## The Fisher

Written for The Western Home Monthly By W. R. Gilbert

IF EVER an animal was misnamed, that animal is the fisher or pennant marten of the Canadian forests. The fisher cannot fish, though there are few other things he cannot do. As a fierce and terrible fighter he has no equal in all the woods; as a climber, not even the squirrel and the marten can compare with him: he can out-run the jack rabbit in the open—in fact, he is the fiercest and most wonderfully equipped demon of slaughter, nature has seen fit to inflict upon her solitudes. Brownish black in color, bearlike about the head and shoulders, his general weasel-like build gives no impression as to his abilities, while in size he is about equal to the ordinary domestic cat though slightly heavier of build.

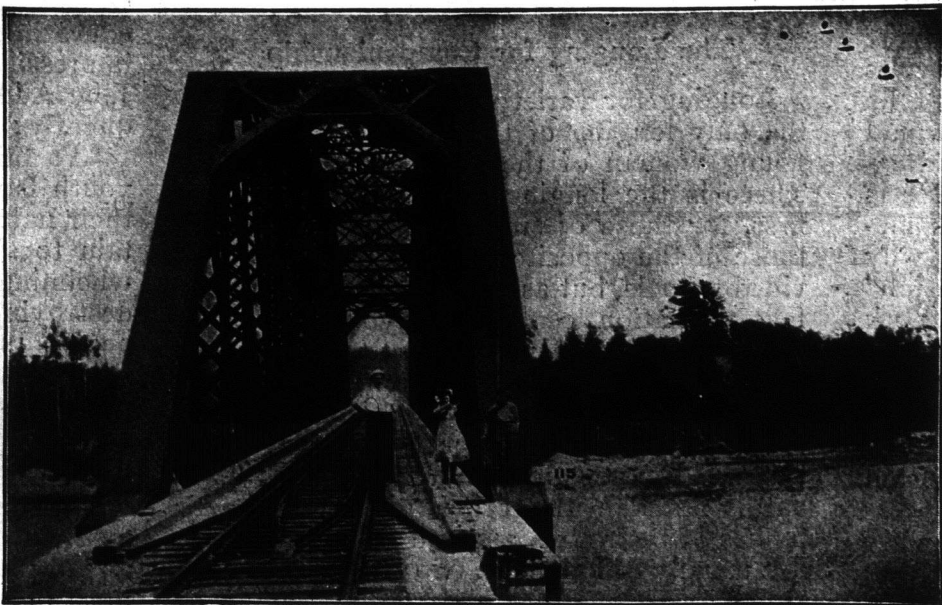
The fisher inhabits the great pine forests of Northern Canada and the eastern States. He is by no means a common animal, but is usually to be found in well watered districts where the pioneers axe has not yet penetrated. On the prairie lands he is unknown.

Though the fisher has been classified as a marten, he possesses many characteristics which seem to define him as

In disposition the fisher is utterly fearless, and in spite of his diminutive size, there are very few animals in the Canadian forests that he will not readily attack—the bear, the wolverine, and the timber wolf are, indeed the only three which appear safe from the ravages of this dreadful little killer. Trappers have many times reported cases of a fisher running down and killing the fierce and powerful lynx, a beast double its weight and so large and formidable that it has actually been known to attack Indian women and children.

When seen side by side, one would not imagine for a moment that a fisher would stand a ghostly chance in combat with the lynx, and the idea of the smaller animal making an unprovoked attack upon this huge grey cat seems utterly absurd. Yet the fisher is an exception to all rules. Most wild animals are at all times ready to avoid a scrap with a formidable foe, but the fisher has been known to go out of his way in search of trouble.

Everyone knows that the common fox is a clever and formidable fighter, against whom even a big foxhound



G.T.P. Steel Girder Bridge.

more nearly related to the wolverine—the dreaded glutton of the northern woods. Like the wolverine he will rob the trappers dead falls as fast as the latter can set them, reaching the bait from the top log, so that, when the catch is sprung, the falling of it cannot injure him. Thus he springs trap after trap, following in the trappers footsteps, and it is only by skill and strategy that the woodsman stands a chance of outwitting him.

Among the trees the fisher is entirely at home. The common marten can catch the squirrel with ease by jumping from tree to tree in pursuit, while in the same manner the fisher has no difficulty whatever in catching the marten. It is said he will jump to the ground from a height of forty feet, while he will actually clear a horizontal distance of eighteen feet, never failing to clasp the branch he has aimed for.

I once witnessed a marten chasing a squirrel, and never saw a more wonderful acrobatic performance. The squirrel was up and away in surprising short time, but almost immediately the marten was on his heels, when they both passed from view. For any animal to have overtaken that marten seemed the very height of impossibility.

When hunted with dogs, the fisher will turn at bay almost immediately, and woe betide the first hound should it come along singly and open an attack.

Coon hunters often flush a fisher by mistake, but when this happens the old and experienced hound has more sense than to open an attack before his supporters arrive. Gathering round the obstacle, at the base of which the fisher is crouching, the dogs wait till they see an opening in the defence, but very often the dogs are entirely bested, and put to rout before the hunter can arrive.

would stand a poor chance fighting singly. The fisher has been known to follow the trail of a single fox for days, ultimately running its quarry to a standstill and despatching it without effort.

I knew a trapper, who one day stumbled upon one of his traps unexpectedly. The trap had been dragged from its place, and in it, held by one paw, was a fisher. The trapper almost trod upon the imprisoned brute, whereupon it turned upon him with such fury that he was compelled to retreat a few paces. The ferocity of the brute, he said, was almost incredible, and it was not until its eyes were glazed in death, that its jaws released their grip upon the trap.

The raccoon is a powerful fighter, which few dogs can outmatch in single combat, yet where "coons" are plentiful they form the staple diet of the fisher. Deer he has been known to kill by dropping on them in the branches, and biting at them so savagely that eventually they dropped from loss of blood.

When fighting, the fisher has no idea as to when he is beaten. He may be blinded, or have one of his eyes actually torn out, but still he will continue to fight to a finish. Fishers have been caught so dreadfully battered about by their encounters that the fur was valueless.

It has been stated that no animal will attack the porcupine on account of its formidable armament of quills. Each quill is equipped with a thousand tiny barbs, and these barbs becoming fast in the flesh of an animal cause the quill to work inwards, and this speedily causes death.

But the fisher will attack the porcupine without compunction, while, curiously enough the quills that enter his flesh do him no harm. In time they work out again without causing the least

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