

SCIENCE in the Park

Common raccoon

Procyon lotor

Family: **Procyonidae**

Omnivore / Prey

Native to Virginia



The common raccoon is one of the most populous mammals within the James River Park System. Raccoons live in wooded areas and climb trees to escape predators. They make their nests among the branches. Due to their adaptability, large raccoon populations are found within many urban areas. Raccoons are usually nocturnal and are omnivorous, eating both plants and animals including fruits, nuts, worms, fish, and insects. Studies have shown that raccoons are very intelligent and can remember solutions to certain tasks for up to three years.

Fun Facts

- Raccoons will often dabble for underwater food near the shoreline. When they find something interesting, they will pick it up, examine it, and rub it, often giving the impression of “washing” the item.
- The black markings on their faces make raccoons look like bandits and were a great source of mythology for the Native Americans.
- In urban environments, raccoons are fond of “dumpster diving” and forage for food in trashcans.
- Christopher Columbus is the first person known to have written about the raccoon.
- Raccoons can run as fast as fifteen miles per hour and is one of the few mammals that can climb down a tree trunk headfirst.