

OUTDOORS +

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A picture of a badger's claws next to my hand for size comparison. (Photo by Mark Rackay)

ALL ABOUT BADGERS

My family owned a summer home in the north woods of Wisconsin during my early years. I was fortunate to spend around 20 summers there. Most of my time was spent in the woods or on the water. Only when the hunger pains got to me, would I be indoors.

The Wisconsin state animal is the badger. I must say that in 20 years, I never saw one. Here in Colorado, I have seen quite a few over the years, yet they get little attention.

Badgers are a member of the weasel family, which includes skunks, otters and martens. The largest and most rare to see member of the weasel family is the Wolverine, which is somewhat similar in appearance, but much larger.

The badger has short legs, a flattened body and shaggy fur that varies from a grayish to yellow/brown color. They have a white belly and a black and white pattern on their face with a white stripe down their nose.

A full-grown badger may be 20 pounds and reach 2 feet in length. They have a tail about 6 inches long. The badger is a burrowing animal; capable of digging deep holes in short order. They have incredibly long claws, very useful for digging. The claws look very intimidating on such a small animal, and never would I want to be on the business end of them.

This digging is why many people have issues with them. The holes can be deep enough to injure horses and cattle. If you happen to do a one-legger down a badger hole, you would probably face a long recovery and I doubt it would do much for your golf score. The tunnel

dug by a badger can reach 10 feet in length.

Badgers are considered a nomadic creature, often moving around in search of prey. They will have a series of holes and dens within their territory. Usually, a badger is a solitary critter, except during the breeding season, which is late summer and early fall. A single badger may have a home range of up to 2,000 acres.

Most of the time, badgers are active at night. They usually remain in their dens during daylight hours. The best time to see them is dawn and dusk.

The main food source for badgers includes ground squirrels, prairie dogs, voles, gophers and other small mammals. They use those claws to dig out their



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

prey, usually with their eyes closed. Badgers rely on a keen sense of smell and hearing to find their prey.

The badger is not exactly on top of the food chain. Natural enemies of the badger include the coyote, mountain lion, bobcat, bear and eagles all of which consider him a tasty meal.

Badgers have been made out as a villain because of that masked face, large

incisors and long claws. Add to that, he makes a hissing and growling sound when you approach him. All of it is really just hot air, because they are generally harmless to humans, unless of course, you step on him when you do a one-legger in his den.

To me, the badger is proof that Mother Nature really thought things out. If the old bag had made him a 250-pound creature, gave him a nasty disposition, and turned him loose, we would all be in trouble.

A creature like that could turn you into a fair resemblance of a messy Toll House cookie mix in short order. Fortunately for us, he is very passive and mild-mannered.

In August of 2017, a badger made an appearance on the campus of the University

of Colorado at the Boulder Campus. The officials of CU warned visitors to stay away from the “extremely dangerous” animal as he moved through the area.

Fortunately, Colorado Parks and Wildlife came to the critter's rescue. They explained to all that he is not a dangerous animal and that they had him all wrong. He was just passing through, probably in search of food.

Our species of badger in Colorado is a relative to the famous honey badger. The honey badger makes Africa its home, and has the reputation of being the most fearless animal in the world. It earned that reputation because it will chase lions off of their prey, attacks a beehive of killer bees and is immune to snake venom.

Good news for us is there are no honey badgers in Colorado.

Badgers are considered a fur-bearer in Colorado, not a varmint. This means that their fur has a commercial value and provides opportunities for sport harvest. Fur of the badger is sometimes used for shaving brushes and paint brushes. The season dates for badgers run from Nov. 1 through the month of February annually.

I have been lucky enough to see the badger in the wild many times here on the Western Slope. I like the fierce-looking creature, unless of course, I am up to my armpits in one of his burrows.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org



A badger out of his den during daylight hours is rare to see. (Photo courtesy of Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

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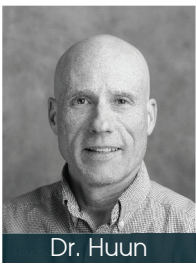
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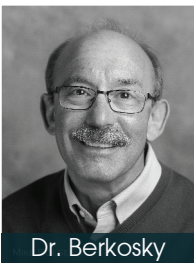
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