

OUTDOORS

FRIDAY, JANUARY 1, 2021 A9

Year of the wolverine



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

BY TIPS FROM THE POSSE

BY MARK RACKAY

The year 2020 was known as the "Year of the Rat." I don't see that as a fitting, or an accurate description of this terrible year. I am going to call 2020 the "year of the dumpster fire."

My wife is a very optimistic person, finding the good in anything. First came the COVID and she said, "Well it can't get any worse." Then, it got worse.

Next came the closing of businesses and layoffs, and she said, "At least we have finally hit rock bottom," only to have the bottom



The wolverine is not seen in the wild very often, so getting a picture of one can be difficult. (Picture courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife)

when most of them were killed off.

The wolverine does well

grizzly will usually turn tail and run. Whatever the wolverine does not finish,

yet another reason for my nomination as animal of the year.

a wolverine in the wild is around 10 years but some have been known to live

call this the "year of the wolverine."

Mark Rackay is a colum-

only to have the bottom fall out once again.

I have grown quite accustomed to my wife's optimistic pronouncements and don't pay much attention to them. From murder hornets to killer bees, I just can't wait to see what is next.

The Ox represents the year 2021. I have no idea what that means as to the quality of the year coming up, but I have my doubts. I propose that we get a hold of the year, and let a real crafty, wise and resilient animal guide us; the wolverine.

The North American wolverine is a very elusive and reserved mammal, preferring to stay in high altitude habitat. They are native to Colorado but almost non-existent, as far as we know.

The scientific name for the wolverine, in case you were wondering, is *Gulo gulo*. *Gulo* is the Latin word for glutton. I don't understand the science behind naming a critter glutton glutton, but I am not a scientist.

Wolverines are the largest members of the weasel family, reaching 3-and-1/2-feet in length and topping the scales at over 50 pounds. Known populations of wolverines exist in Montana, and occasionally Wyoming and Idaho. The United States population is estimated at 200 to 300 animals. Colorado has not seen a substantial population since the early 1900s

The wolverine does well in the arctic and subarctic regions of the world, especially in areas like Alaska and the northern regions of Canada. They prey on small and large mammals, often times scavenging the kill of other animals.

The fur of a wolverine is hydrophobic, resisting water similar to a duck's back. Their fur is extremely thick and oily, and they are capable of resting in a bare shelter in the harshest of climate conditions, making them a true survivor. That survivor characteristic is one of the reasons I nominate them for the animal of the year.

Male wolverines have an extremely large range, up to 500 miles, while the female may range 250 miles. They both have the ability to cover 20 to 30 miles a day. The wolverine is a true loner and very territorial by nature, but what a large territory.

The paws of a wolverine have incredibly long and sharp claws. These claws make them great tree climbers. They have short legs so they do not run down their prey, preferring to lie hidden in a tree and then pounce on the unsuspecting animal.

Wolverines will scavenge the prey of other animals, especially the grizzly bear. You may think that is a death wish but it isn't. When the wolverine approaches the bear with his hackles raised, teeth showing and growling ferociously, the mighty

wolverine does not finish, he will bury or store for another day.

Female wolverines are known to have a delayed implantation, which means the eggs float around the uterus for some time before finally attaching themselves. This process insures that the young are born when food is plentiful, from January to April, regardless of when the mating takes place. Female wolverine will only produce one litter every two to three years.

Spotting a wolverine in Colorado would be a rare occurrence. Many of the reports that Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) receive about sightings are unconfirmed. People often mistake badgers and marmots for a wolverine, so if you see one, make sure to take a picture.

The last confirmed wolverine in Colorado occurred in 2009. An adult male, wearing a radio tagged collar, wandered into Rocky Mountain National Park. Remember the miles they can cover in a day, and their range is extremely large.

The wolverine is officially listed as threatened species in Colorado, and continues to remain a candidate for federal protection. Colorado has successfully introduced the Canada Lynx, black-footed ferret and the river otter, but the wolverine is stalled in a political quagmire in Washington D.C., and

the year.

Introducing wolverine back in Colorado would make sense. The animal is not much of a worry to farmers and ranchers because they typically avoid urban areas. While the wolverine has the ability to take down an adult sized deer, there is little danger for any type of human conflicts. CPW biologists claim that Colorado can sustain a population of up to 100 wolverines safely.

The average lifespan of

have been known to live 15 years. They have only a few natural predators, including bears, mountain lions and wolves. There are laws on the books making it illegal for hunters and ranchers to kill a wolverine, so if an introduction takes place, they have a terrific chance to prosper here.

Here is to saying good riddance to the year 2020. Let us hope that 2021 is a dang sight better. I am going to optimistically

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.

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com.