

## Fishers making a strong comeback in our forests

A Windsor resident has reported that several of her cats have gone missing over recent weeks. She also has sighted "a strange looking animal" in the area.

My first thought: Fishers. The fisher, *Martes pennanti*, also referred to as fisher cats, is a medium-sized mammal native to North America, and closely related to the marten. It is a forest dwelling creature whose range covers much of the boreal forest in Canada to the northern fringes of the United States. They are present in Maine.

Fishers have few predators except for man. While fishers are usually shy and elusive, urban encroachments into their forest habitat have placed them in uncomfortable proximity to humans. In recent years, there have been several reports of fishers attacking small dogs and cats, and in at least one case, a small child.

until the following spring when they give birth and the cycle is renewed. Females den in hollow trees. Kits are born blind and helpless and are partially covered with

In recent years, they have spread their range from Vermont and Maine into southern New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Recent studies suggest that fishers have begun making inroads into suburban backyards, farmland, and even into semi-suburban areas.

If you happen to see a fisher, be aware, they are vicious. Unprovoked attacks on humans are extremely rare, but they will attack if they feel threatened or cornered. A study done in 1979 examined the stomach contents

of all fishers trapped in New Hampshire; cat hairs were found in only one of over 1,000 stomachs. While there is popular belief for more frequent attacks on pets, zoologists suggest bobcats or coyotes are more likely to prey upon domestic cats and chickens. Although, you cannot rule out fishers.

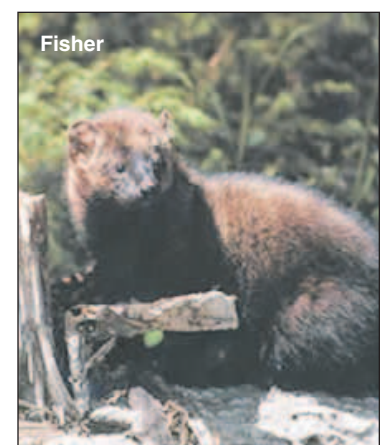
As for the recent case in Windsor, the sightings have been of a strange-looking animal. The suggestion that it might be a fisher is only speculative. **Roland's trivia question of the week:**

In the famous 1978 playoff game between the Red Sox and Yankees, when Bucky Dent hit the game-winning home run. Who was the pitcher for the Red Sox? *Answer on page 15.*

by Roland D. Hallee

### SCORES & OUTDOORS

hair. Kits begin to crawl after about three weeks. After about seven weeks, they open their eyes. They start to climb after eight weeks, and are completely dependent on mother's milk for the first eight to 10 weeks after



Fishers have been trapped since the 18th century for their fur. Their pelts were in such demand that they were driven to near extinction in the early part of the 20th century. In the 1920s, when pelt prices were high, some fur farmers attempted to raise fishers. However, their unusual delayed reproduction made breeding difficult. The population has rebounded, but their current range is still reduced from its historic limits.

Males and females are similar in appearance but the males are larger in size. Males are between three to four feet in length and weigh 8 to 11 pounds.

The fur of the fisher varies seasonally with fur being denser and glossier in the winter. During the summer the colors become more mottled as the fur goes through a molting cycle.

While they are agile climbers, most of their time is spent on the forest floor. They also prefer to forage where there is a lot of fallen dead wood. Fishers are not fussy eaters. They will feed on any animal they can catch and will eat carrion. They are also known to supplement their meat diet with insects, nuts, berries and mushrooms. Since they are solitary hunters their choice of prey is limited to their size. Analysis of stomach contents have found evidence of birds, small mammals, and even moose and deer, indicating they are not averse to eating carrion. They show a preference for Snowshoe hare, and are one of the few predators that can successfully hunt porcupine. Despite their name, fishers seldom eat fish.

The reproductive cycle of the fisher lasts almost the entire year. Female fishers give birth to a litter of 3-4 kittens in the spring. They nurse and care for their kits up until late summer when they are old enough to set out on their own. Shortly after giving birth, females enter estrus and leave their den to find a mate. The early stage of development, before formation of the embryo, is delayed

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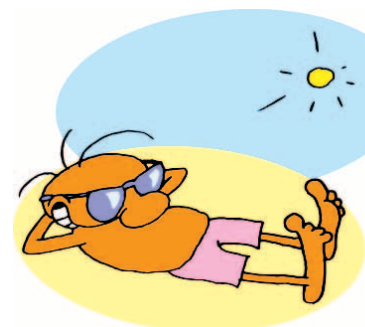
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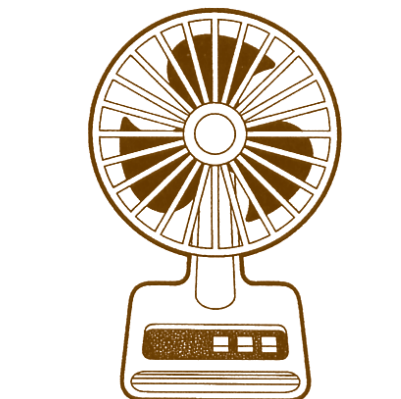
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