

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Wolverine: The Skunk Bear

by Guy Belleranti

Do you know what a skunk bear is? No, it's not a bear that smells bad. It's not a bear at all. It's a nickname for the wolverine.

Wolverines are the second largest member of the weasel family. Other animals in this family include badgers, ferrets, minks, ermines, martins and otters, including the family's largest member, the giant otter.



But why is the wolverine nicknamed the "skunk bear"? Well, its short-legged, thick, muscular body makes it look a bit like a small bear. And often it can indeed smell a bit stinky. This is especially true of the males who use scent glands to mark territory.

Wolverines live in the colder northern areas of North America, Europe and Asia. They're solitary animals and not often seen. Their heavy, oily fur repels water and provides protection from frost.

For their size wolverines may be strongest and fiercest of all animals. They're only as large as a medium-sized dog, but they'll fight to defend their meals from larger animals like bears and even from packs of wolves. What kind of meals do wolverines like? Primarily meat. However, they also eat plants, seeds and berries if that's all they can find. They travel many miles each day searching for food.

Wolverines have sharp claws, powerful jaws and sharp teeth. One of their teeth is a special kind of upper molar. They use this molar to bite through the bones and meat of frozen dead animals they find in their travels. Wolverine also hunt live prey, eating small animals like mice, shrews and rabbits, medium sized animals like beavers, weasels and porcupines and weakened or injured large animals like deer, caribou and elk.

The wolverines' main predators are wolves, mountain lions and bears. At one time people hunted them for their thick and attractive fur. Today, however, wolverines are protected in many areas.

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1. Wolverines are most closely related to...

- a. bears
- b. wolves
- c. weasels
- d. skunks

2. Why don't people often see wolverines?

- a. Wolverines like to live alone, away from people.
- b. Wolverines are so fast people cannot see them.
- c. They are too small to see easily.
- d. They blend in with their snowy surroundings.

3. Are wolverines herbivores, carnivores, or omnivores? Explain your answer.

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4. Reread the following sentence from the article.

*Their heavy, oily fur repels water and provides protection from the frost.*

Which is the best definition for the underlined word?

- a. keeps away
- b. keeps warm
- c. soaks up
- d. drinks

4. Tell whether each sentence below is true or false. Write T or F on each line.

\_\_\_\_\_ Wolverines hunt and eat wolves.

\_\_\_\_\_ A wolverine can hunt and eat a porcupine.

\_\_\_\_\_ Wolverines hunt in large groups.

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.



\_\_\_\_\_ 1. muscular

a. hurt

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. solitary

b. good-looking

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. molar

c. strong

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. injured

d. reindeer

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. porcupines

e. an animal or person that prefers to be alone

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. caribou

f. water from the air that forms icy, white crystals on plants, animals, and objects in nature

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. attractive

g. mammals with sharp quills, or needles, on its body

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. frost

h. type of tooth for grinding food



# ANSWER KEY

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1. Wolverines are most closely related to... **c**
  - a. bears
  - b. wolves
  - c. **weasels**
  - d. skunks
2. Why don't people often see wolverines? **a**
  - a. **Wolverines like to live alone, away from people.**
  - b. Wolverines are so fast people cannot see them.
  - c. They are too small to see easily.
  - d. They blend in with their snowy surroundings.
3. Are wolverines herbivores, carnivores, or omnivores? Explain your answer.

**Wolverines are omnivores because they hunt and eat animals. They will also eat berries, nuts, plants, and seeds.**

4. Reread the following sentence from the article.

*Their heavy, oily fur repels water and provides protection from the frost.*

Which is the best definition for the underlined word? **a**

- a. **keeps away**
  - b. keeps warm
  - c. soaks up
  - d. drinks
4. Tell whether each sentence below is true or false. Write T or F on each line.
    - F** Wolverines hunt and eat wolves.
    - T** A wolverine can hunt and eat a porcupine.
    - F** Wolverines hunt in large groups.

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**f.** water from the air that forms icy, white crystals on plants, animals, and objects in nature

**b** 7. attractive

**g.** mammals with sharp quills, or needles, on its body

**f** 8. frost

**h.** type of tooth for grinding food