MEET THEM AT PLUMPTON PARK ZOO

N. AMERICAN PORCUPINE

Erethizon dorsatum

Teacher & Student Fact Sheet · © **2026 Plumpton Park Zoological Gardens Inc.**
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Fast facts

ANIMAL GROUP	Mammal; rodent
NATIVE REGION	Canada, Alaska, U.S. and northern Mexico
HABITAT	Forests, grasslands, shrublands and tundra
DIET	Herbivore: bark, twigs, leaves
SIZE	25-36 in including tail
WEIGHT	12-35 lb
LIFESPAN	Guide: 5-7 yr wild; wild records to 18
STATUS	Least Concern



Photo: Plumpton Park Zoo

Did you know?

- A North American porcupine has about 30,000 quills.
- Porcupines cannot throw or shoot their quills.
- Only the beaver is a larger North American rodent.
- A baby porcupine is called a porcupette.
- Porcupines are good climbers and good swimmers.

Words to know

Barb: A tiny backward-facing hook on a quill.
Nocturnal: Active mainly at night.
Herbivore: An animal that eats plants.
Porcupette: A young porcupine.

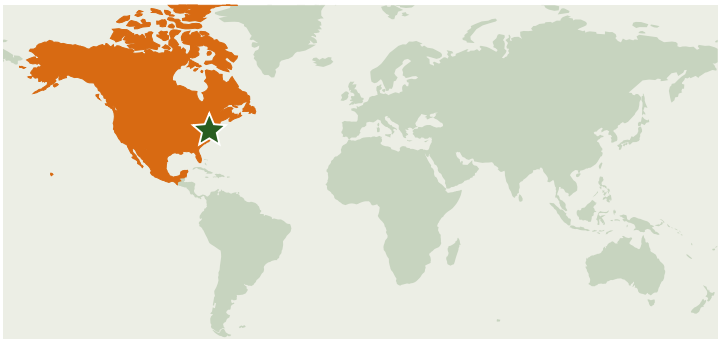
Think about it

1. About how many quills does a porcupine have?
2. Use page evidence to explain how quills and claws help a porcupine survive.
3. What does a porcupine eat in winter?
4. What is a baby porcupine called?
5. How does a mother help her porcupette grow?

Draw it

Draw a porcupine climbing a tree. Label its quills, claws, tail and feet. Explain how one labeled part helps it survive.

Where it lives in the wild



Lives in the wild ★ Plumpton Park Zoo, Rising Sun, MD

STANDARDS · GRADES 1–4 **WRITTEN FOR GRADES 3–5**

Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 1-LS1-2**
Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.1.B**

Draw here

Learn more: https://plumptonparkzoo.org/mammals/north-american-porcupine/ · **Sources:** Smithsonian National Zoo; Animal Diversity Web
Supports Maryland and Delaware (NGSS) and Pennsylvania (STEELS) standards: 4-LS1-1 (3.1.4.A) · 1-LS1-2 (3.1.1.B)
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N. AMERICAN PORCUPINE

Before and after your visit

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Before you visit · 5 minutes

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Predict: where in the wild does the North American porcupine live?

Circle one (or more if it lives on more than one):

Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | North America | South America

2. Predict: what does it eat?

☐ plants ☐ other animals ☐ both

3. Word hunt: find these words on page 1. Put a check by each one you already know.

☐ Barb ☐ Nocturnal ☐ Herbivore ☐ Porcupette

Pick one word and write what it means in your own words:

_____

_____

4. My question: one thing I want to find out when I see the North American porcupine.

_____

_____

At the zoo · look closely

Watch for one minute. What is it doing?

☐ resting ☐ eating ☐ moving ☐ watching ☐ with others

Draw or describe one body part that helps it survive, and say how it helps.

Draw here

After your visit · talk it over

1. Check your prediction. Native region: Canada, Alaska, U.S. and northern Mexico. Was your guess right?

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ partly

2. Diet check. The fact sheet says: Herbivore: bark, twigs, leaves. What did you learn about how it finds or eats food?

_____

_____

3. Discuss with a partner, then write your best answer.

• Use page evidence to explain how quills and claws help a porcupine survive.

_____

• What does a porcupine eat in winter?

_____

4. Exit ticket.

One thing I learned: _____

One thing I still wonder: _____

ADJUST IT

Grades K–2: talk and draw instead of writing; read the questions aloud. **Grades 6–8:** add evidence from the fact sheet and the animal page to every answer.