

EVERGLADES MINK By Libby Hopkins



The Everglades Mink, or the Neovison *Vison Evergladensis* as it's known by its scientific name, is a member of the weasel family. They are semi-aquatic, carnivorous mammals that are related to weasels, otters, ferrets, badgers, and martens.

The Everglades Mink can reach a length of 25 inches. This species has dark brown and silky fur on its body and may have white spots on its chin and chest. It also has a flattened head and small, rounded ears.

The Everglades Mink, a disjunct population of the American mink, inhabits southern Florida and, in particular, the shallow freshwater marshes of the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp region. Most sightings and specimens have come from Collier or Dade County, but the Everglades Mink presumably inhabits northern and eastern Monroe County as well.

Everglades Minks are generally solitary animals except when raising their young. A litter of three to six kits is born inside the den during the spring. The kits are born hairless at birth but quickly grow their hair and open their eyes after about 25 days. At five to six weeks, they are weaned, but kits stay near their mother until fall. Females stay within 30 acres of their den, which is typically in a hollow log or stump or under tree roots. Males roam twice as far and will socialize at other dens during their travels.

Everglades Minks are largely crepuscular or active near dawn and dusk but can be active at any time of the day or night, with peak activity varying by habitat, season, prey availability, and predator activity.

They are lithe and agile animals. A mink seen sneaking around on its stomach is most likely stalking prey. A mink seen bounding across a road or field is likely traveling. Their activity levels have been observed to increase before storms and changes in weather. Like all weasels, minks are fierce fighters, capable of attacking

prey much larger than themselves. They opportunistically hunt both aquatic as well as terrestrial prey, focusing on whatever is most available and easily captured. The diet of the Everglades mink primarily consists of small mammals, snakes, and insects.

The Everglades Mink population faces many threats as the increase of human development continues in Florida. Human disturbance and modifications to the wetlands that might impact minks include drainage, logging, dike construction, canal construction, road construction, reappportioning water for competing interests, the introduction of fire into the forest, and the introduction of pesticides into their habitat.

Changes in water levels within the marshes can lead to destruction of habitat and encroachment of exotic vegetation. Canine distemper virus affects the central nervous system, and respiratory and digestive tract, so it's a virulent disease that is deadly to the Everglades Mink.

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