

GEHR Watershed Minute #19

Muskrat: (194 words)

The muskrat is a medium-sized semi-aquatic rodent commonly found in the tidal wetland marshes of the Great Egg Harbor Estuary. An adult muskrat is about 24 inches long and weighs up to 4 pounds.

Muskrats are covered with short, thick, medium to dark brown fur that has two layers to protect them from cold water. They have long tails which are covered with scales rather than hair and are flattened vertically to aid them in swimming. Muskrats are called "rats" in a general sense because they are medium-sized rodents with an adaptable lifestyle and eat both plants and animals. They are not, however, so-called "true rats".

Muskrats are most active at night or near dawn and dusk. Plant materials make up about 95 percent of their diets, but they also eat small animals such as freshwater mussels, frogs, crayfish, fish, and small turtles.

Muskrats can have 2 to 3 litters a year of 6 to 8 young each, and young muskrats mature in 6 months. Eagles, owls, hawks, fox, coyotes, otters, snakes, snapping turtles and humans eat muskrats.

Muskrats are also trapped for their fur, and there are no trapping limits in the watershed.