

The Rockies



THE ROCKIES ARE A VAST range of mountains that stretch down the western side of North America. The Rockies form a barrier to the moist winds which sweep towards the continent from the Pacific Ocean. As these winds rise up over the mountains and cool, the water they carry falls as rain or snow. On the mountain peaks, winds can reach 320 kph (200 mph) and temperatures may fall to -51°C (-60°F). The Rockies provide a refuge for animals that have been hunted or driven out of other habitats by people. Some species are specially adapted for climbing and jumping on the mountain slopes. Many animals have warm fur to protect them against the cold and the winds.



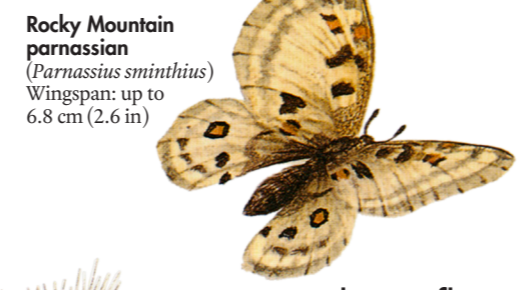
Grizzled giant

The huge grizzly bear gets its name from the whitish (grizzled) tips of its hair. It can kill an animal as large as a moose or caribou, but usually feeds on smaller animals, fish, and plants. A grizzly can run as fast as a horse for short distances and may stand up on its back legs to get a better view of its prey, which it kills with its long front claws. In autumn, the grizzly eats as much as possible to build up stores of fat to last it through its winter hibernation.

Grizzly bear
(*Ursus arctos horribilis*)
Total length: up to 3 m (9 ft 10 in)



North American porcupine
(*Erethizon dorsatum*)
Body length: up to 1.3 m (4 ft 4 in)
Tail: up to 25 cm (9.8 in)



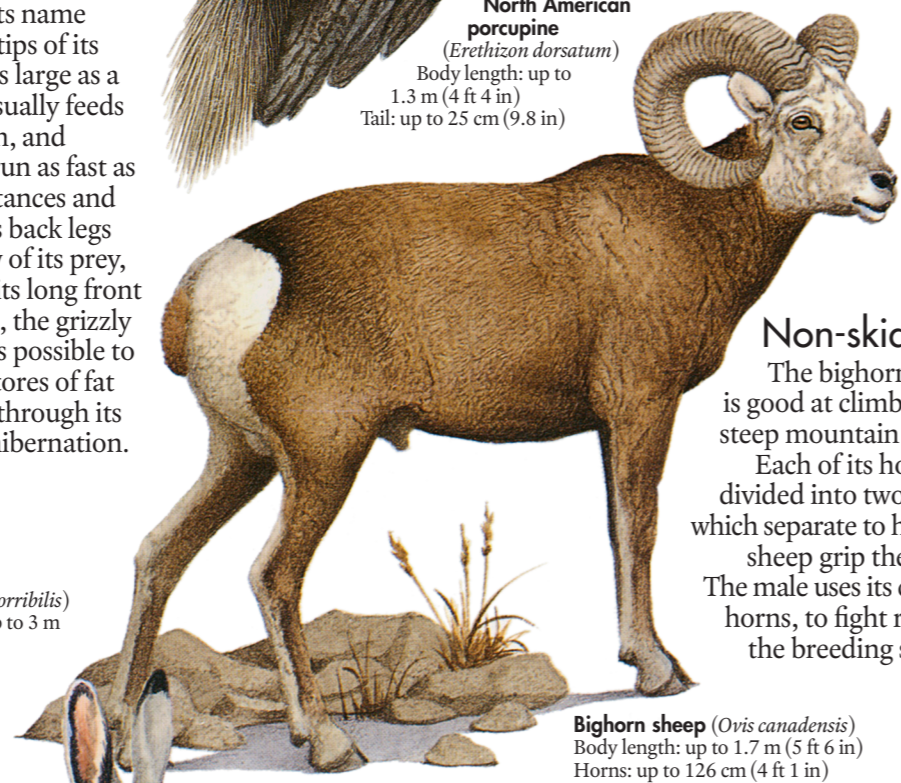
Rocky Mountain parnassian
(*Parnassius sminthius*)
Wingspan: up to 6.8 cm (2.6 in)

Summer butterfly

Male phoebus butterflies appear in the Rockies in mid-summer. They fly across the meadows to find the females, which emerge eight to ten days later.

Spiky armour

The porcupine's furry coat hides about 30,000 spiky hairs, called quills. When threatened, the porcupine turns its back, raises its quills, and lashes its tail. Its barbed tail quills stick into an enemy's skin.



Non-skid feet

The bighorn sheep is good at climbing the steep mountain slopes. Each of its hooves is divided into two halves which separate to help the sheep grip the rocks. The male uses its curving horns, to fight rivals in the breeding season.

Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*)
Body length: up to 1.7 m (5 ft 6 in)
Horns: up to 126 cm (4 ft 1 in)

Winter white

In summer the snowshoe hare has brown fur, but in winter it grows a white coat for camouflage against the snow. It also develops dense fur on its feet, which stop it from sinking into the snow.



Snowshoe hare
(*Lepus americanus*)
Length: up to 58 cm (23 in)



Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*)
Height at shoulder: 58 cm (22.8 in) Length: up to 1.2 m (3 ft 9 in)

Spotted camouflage

The bobcat's spotted coat helps it to blend in with its environment, so that it can creep up on its prey. It usually feeds on rabbits and hares, but will eat almost any reptile, mammal, or bird. It can even kill a deer, providing enough food for a week or more.

Tree glider

The northern flying squirrel glides from tree to tree using flaps of skin along the sides of its body which unfold like wings. It can glide up to 38 m (125 ft), moving its legs and using its tail to change direction.



Northern flying squirrel
(*Glaucomys sabrinus*)
Body length: up to 19 cm (7.5 in)
Tail: up to 16 cm (6.3 in)



Mountain bluebird
(*Sialia currucoides*)
Length: up to 20 cm (7.8 in)

Insect catcher

The mountain bluebird eats seeds, berries, and insects. It darts out from a perch to snatch any insects flying past or flies low to pounce on prey on the ground.



White-tailed ptarmigan
(*Lagopus leucura*)
Length: up to 34 cm (13.4 in)

Feathered feet

The ptarmigan's feathered feet keep it warm and stop it sinking into the snow. During the breeding season, the female's striped feathers camouflage her on the nest. In winter both the male and female grow white feathers to hide them on the snow.



Puma (*Puma concolor*)
Height at shoulder: up to 70 cm (2 ft 3 in)
Body length: up to 2.4 m (7 ft 10 in)

Prowling pouncer

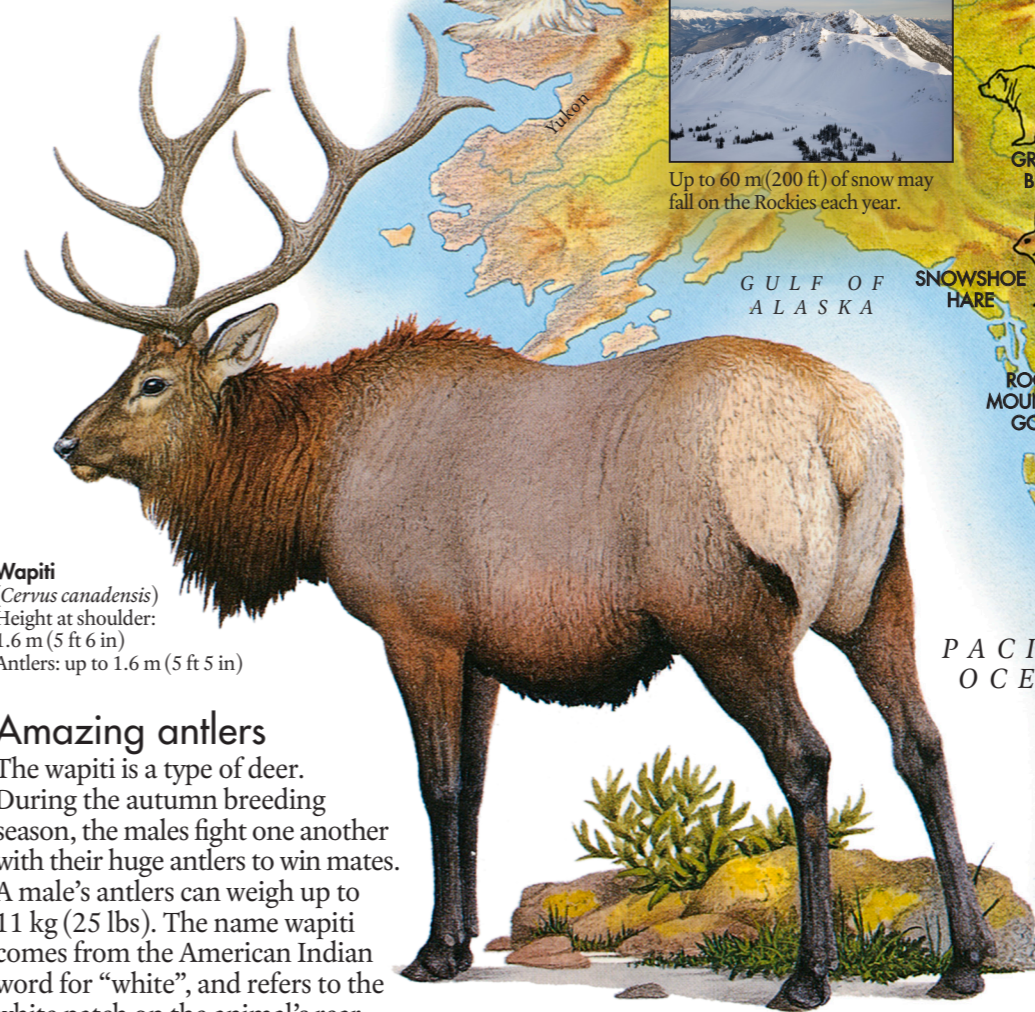
The puma (also called the mountain lion or cougar) stalks its prey at night. It creeps up on its victim and then pounces on it from an overhanging tree or rock. Long, sharp claws help the mountain lion to hold its prey, which it kills by biting through the neck.



Rocky Mountain goat
(*Oreamnos americanus*)
Height to shoulder: up to 1.1 m (3 ft 7 in)

Clinging toes

The Rocky Mountain goat has curved toes, which help it to cling to steep slopes and rocky crags where it is safe from most enemies. A baby goat can stand minutes after birth, and can follow its mother over the steep slopes within days.



Wapiti
(*Cervus canadensis*)
Height at shoulder: 1.6 m (5 ft 6 in)
Antlers: up to 1.6 m (5 ft 5 in)

Amazing antlers

The wapiti is a type of deer. During the autumn breeding season, the males fight one another with their huge antlers to win mates. A male's antlers can weigh up to 11 kg (25 lbs). The name wapiti comes from the American Indian word for "white", and refers to the white patch on the animal's rear.



Many of North America's great rivers, such as the Missouri, start in the Rockies.

Up to 60 m (200 ft) of snow may fall on the Rockies each year.

The slopes of the Rockies are covered by fir and pine trees.

