



Klamath Network Featured Creature

August 2012

Ermine (*Mustela erminea*)

General Description: Ermines, also commonly called Stoats (*Mustela erminea*), are small carnivorous creatures belonging to the family Mustelidae. They are easily distinguished from the similar looking least weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) by an obvious black tip of their tail, which weasels lack. Their coat coloration is light brown with a white underbelly during the summer, with rough sparse fur, but changes to thick, soft, and pure white during the winter months. Though ermines are highly varied in size, generally males are 7.4-12.8 inches (187-325 mm) and females 6.7-11 in (170-270 mm) in length.



Image from USFWS

Interesting Fact: Ermines are very athletic. Accomplished in swimming and tree climbing (they can descend headfirst), they are ferocious predators capable of killing prey much larger than themselves and are able to bound to catch prey at approximately 20 mph (9 m/s)¹.



Image from globedia.com

Behavior: Mating season of ermines is between April and July, and young have an extremely long gestation period of 280 days. Litters have 4-9 offspring, females maturing after only 2-3 weeks, while males take a year to mature. They seldom live much beyond 2 years of age, though they are known live up to 7 years in favorable habitats. Ermines are solitary creatures and are usually seen alone outside of mating season. They have the characteristic territorial pattern of other Mustelidae, with several female territories within each larger male territory. An older dominant male's territory can be up to 50 times the size of a younger male's.

Distribution: Native to most of the northern latitudes of North America and Eurasia, Ermines were introduced to New Zealand in an attempt to control rampant rabbit populations and have since become a major invasive threat to native bird populations on the island, being particularly devastating to ground and hole nesting birds.

Where to see in the Klamath

Parks: Ermines can be found in all six of the Klamath Parks. Ermines are not endangered.

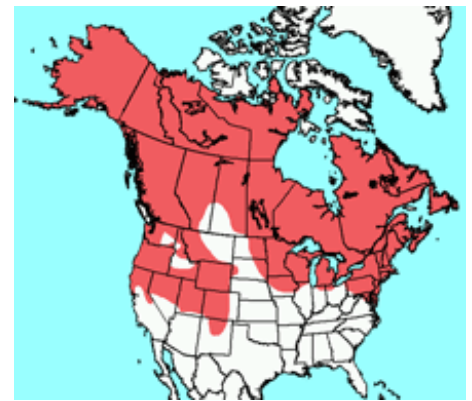


Image from www.mnh.si.edu

Habitat and Diet: Ermines frequently live in a variety of habitats across their expanse range. Meadows along forests, woodlands near riparian areas, and marshes are preferred. Burrows are usually found in old rodent holes, tree roots, hollow logs, and stony rubble, and are lined with vegetation. Ermines prey on many small mammals and rabbits, but can eat amphibians, reptiles, insects, and birds and their eggs. They are notorious for surplus killing, and often kill much more prey than they require, killing the prey by efficiently biting the back of its neck (as below – from Wikipedia.org).



More Information:

¹ www.ypte.org.uk
www.iucnredlist.org/details/29674/0