

## Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*)

**Skunks** have good senses of smell and hearing but poor eyesight, so they do most of their hunting at night. Skunks are omnivores eating fruits, insects, worms, reptiles, rodents, and even venomous snakes. When threatened, the skunk will growl, stamp the ground, and raise his tail. If that fails, he will spray an obnoxious liquid which will usually repel ground predators. But predators from the air who have no sense of smell, like the great horned owl, are not bothered by any of this.



## Nine-Banded Armadillo (*Dasypus novemcinctus*)

**Armadillos** take their name from Spanish meaning "little armored one." They are very hard of hearing, so rely on smell to track their prey consisting of insects, small reptiles and amphibians, eggs, and some plants. Like skunks and opossums, the armadillo is considered a *gardener's friend*. Although people do not appreciate them digging while looking for grubs, they will also eat beetles, ants, termites, roaches, wasps, scorpions, spiders, and snails. They chew with their little peg-like teeth. Other than its exterior armor, this armadillo's only defense from predators is to run or dive into a burrow.



## Eastern Cottontail Rabbit (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)

**Rabbits** forage on grasses, bark, twigs, leaves, fruit, buds, and seeds. Their front incisor teeth continually grow due to constant nibbling. Hunted by most predators, rabbits are the ultimate prey animal. But, uncontrolled by predators, they can be destructive to farms.



## White-footed Mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*)

**Mice** are rodents who gnaw their food with two front teeth. Our other rodents include squirrel, gopher, vole, nutria, and rat. Most rodents feed on vegetation like acorns, roots, and seeds; and, some rodents additionally feed on insects like grasshoppers, beetles, ants, and crickets. When their natural predators are too reduced in number, overpopulation of mice and rats can result in devastating economic destruction of grains and can additionally carry diseases to human populations through their fleas and droppings.



Photo courtesy of Raela Wataha



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# PREDATORS & PREY

of Milam County, Texas



All living animals survive by feeding upon other animals or plants for nutrients. An animal who feeds on another is called the predator, and the food animal is called the prey. Many animals can at times be predators and can at other times be prey.

The relationship between predator and prey in a naturally occurring, smoothly running cycle of "eat" and "be eaten" ensures a healthy, diverse, and stable ecosystem. But when the cycle is disrupted by the extreme reduction of any of its contributing members by human actions, balance can be destroyed and chaos can result.

Because around 95% of land in Texas is privately owned, it is critical that landowners understand the interdependence of wildlife species.





**Coyote**  
(*Canis latrans*)

Our top carnivore in Milam County is likely the **coyote** due to the decline of the mountain lion. The coyote's name comes from the Aztec word *coyotl*. The scientific name *Canis latrans* means "barking dog"- describing the coyote's howl and bark. Coyotes are opportunistic omnivores (eating both meat and plants) and are known to eat fruits, mammals, birds, eggs, insects, fish, frogs, and turtles. Coyotes are extremely beneficial to our environment by keeping the rodent population down.



**Texas Bobcat**  
(*Lynx rufus*)

**Bobcats**, known for their short or "bobbed" tails, eat small live and dead animals such as rabbits, squirrels, gophers, mice, rats, birds, insects, and reptiles. Bobcats will also eat dead deer. Their kittens are vulnerable as prey of coyotes, hawks, and owls. Excellent eyesight allows bobcats to distinguish color, see detail, and detect movement night and day. Bobcats, like many other animals, have mirrorlike eye membranes that reflect light making it seem as if their eyes glow in the dark.

## Common Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)

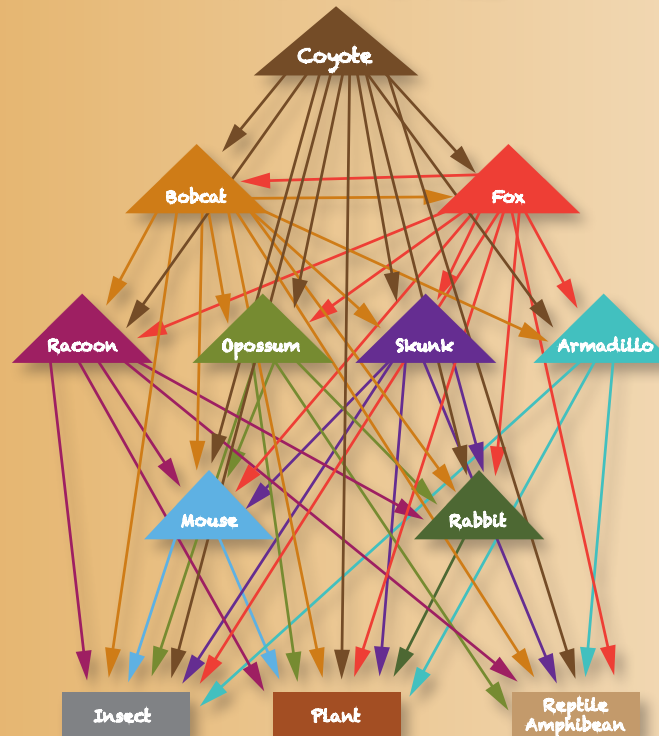
You cannot mistake the black and white striped tails and dark eye masks of the **raccoon**. These intelligent, nocturnal omnivores eat just about anything they can find, including garbage. They will eat insects, dead animals, fruits, nuts, and seeds. Raccoons also catch fish, snails, frogs, and crayfish in creeks and ponds where the water helps their sensitive paws identify what they are about to eat. Raccoon predators include bobcats, coyotes, domestic dogs, large owls, and eagles.



**Common Gray Fox**  
(*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

**Foxes** are omnivores eating mostly fruits, grains, insects, small rodents, birds, and rabbits. They help to protect farms from the damage of small animals and insects. Even though they belong to the canine family they act like cats by climbing trees and jumping from branch to branch, and because of this they are called "tree foxes." Foxes hunt for food mostly at night due to their excellent night vision. Graceful, beautiful, bright eyed and bushy-tailed, foxes are a delight to observe.

## Food Web



**Virginia Opossum**  
(*Didelphis virginiana*)

**Opossums** are the only marsupial (carrying her joeys in her pouch) found in North America. They are omnivores that eat just about anything they can catch. Opossums eat ticks, even off their own bodies, helping to prevent the spread of Lyme disease. Known as the *gardener's friend*, they eat such things as snails, slugs, spiders, cockroaches, rats, mice and even venomous snakes. When threatened, opossums stick out their tongues, faint with fear, and emit a putrid odor, which usually causes any predator to lose interest.

