

# Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science

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Volume 24 | Annual Issue

Article 41

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1917

## An Annotated List of the Mammals of Sac County, Iowa

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### Recommended Citation

Spurrell, J. A. (1917) "An Annotated List of the Mammals of Sac County, Iowa," *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 24(1), 273-284.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/pias/vol24/iss1/41>

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AN ANNOTATED LIST OF THE MAMMALS OF  
SAC COUNTY, IOWA.

J. A. SPURRELL.

My purpose in writing this list is to place on record data gathered principally from the pioneers of Sac county about the conditions in pioneer days and since. While these data are not as accurate as though they were confirmed by specimens, they are better than no information at all. I have used extreme care in differentiating species, and have included some observations of my own made in the more recent years. I have also included some data on adjoining counties.

I have numbered my contributors of data and will refer to them by number.

1. Asa Platt. Mr. Platt was a fur trader, trading with the Indians and whites in early days. He came to Sac county first in 1856.

2. C. Orville Lee. Mr. Lee was born in Sac county in 1864. His parents came to the county in 1854. He hunted and trapped a great deal in his youth and still has an active interest in game birds and animals.

3. Hugh Cory. Mr. Cory came to the county in September, 1854, at the age of ten years. He hunted and trapped much in the earlier days.

4. Shelt Tiberghien. Mr. Tiberghien came to the county in 1856, when he was fifteen years old. He also was a hunter and trapper.

All four of the men previously named still live at Sac City.

5. C. Everett Lee. Mr. Eyerrrett Lee is a brother of C. Orville Lee and resides at Lytton.

6. Platt Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong moved to the vicinity of Lake View in 1878 and at present lives in that town.

7. John Spurrell. My father, who settled one mile north of Wall Lake in 1875, and still lives there.

8. Dr. A. S. Hayden. Dr. Hayden came to Sac county in 1873, when he was eleven years old, and lived with his parents near Sac City. He now lives at Wall Lake.

9. Mrs. E. B. Hayden. The wife of Dr. Hayden. She came to the county in 1878 and lived at Lake View, but was a frequent visitor to the Raccoon river woods.

10. H. B. Smith. Mr. Smith came to the vicinity of Odebolt in 1876. He died a few years ago but his wife still maintains the collection of birds and animals which they formed.

11. H. P. Dudley. Mr. Dudley traveled through Sac county in early days with his father, who was an itinerant minister.

12. J. A. Spurrell. "I have always taken a keen interest in birds and animals since early childhood, and have kept a notebook of my observations since July, 1907."

A part of the scientific names I obtained by correspondence with the Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, and the remainder from "The Mammals of Illinois and Wisconsin," by Charles B. Cory, Publication 153, Zoological Series, Field Museum of Natural History.

Sac county was first settled in 1854, at Grant City and Sac City. For many years the settlers depended on wild game and trapping to furnish a large part of their living. Not until the railroads came about 1870, and furnished markets for bulky farm products, did the county become thickly settled.

The topography is a rolling prairie, and at first settlement there were many marshes, sloughs, and ponds in the eastern half of the county. The eastern half is drained by the Raccoon river which, at the time of settlement, was bordered by a timber fringe from one to four miles wide. The principal enlargements were Grant grove at Grant City and Lee's grove eight miles north of Sac City, also Cory grove south of Sac City. The western half of the county is drained by the Boyer river which was, and is, timberless except for some willow brush and trees along a few miles in the southern part of the county. Today, the timber fringe of the Raccoon river is very much reduced, and artificial groves are scattered all over the prairie portions of the county.

#### ANNOTATED LIST.

Bison or buffalo (*Bison bison*). Buffalo were found only as stragglers after the first white settlers came to the county in 1854, but must have existed much more abundantly previously as shown by the hundreds of buffalo bones thrown up by the dredge when Rush lake was drained in 1911 (2). Many bones

were dug out of a miry place on the Platt Armstrong farm just east of the town of Lake View and one-fourth mile north of Wall lake (6). Bones and teeth were dug up about one mile north of the town of Wall Lake (7). I have a tooth dug up at this point, also a horn dug up in Wall Lake, and another horn plowed up several miles northwest of this town.

A female buffalo was killed in June, 1858, on the county line between Buena Vista and Sac. The person killing her stated that the tallow was as yellow as gold, that she was a three year-old, and had never had a calf. He had also heard of two buffalo crossing the southwest corner of the county in 1860. They were killed near Jefferson (1). Three other buffalo were killed in Sac county west of Lake City by the Sifford boys (3). In 1862 the Johnny Green Indians killed two buffalo on a hunt commencing one and one-half miles south of Newell and extending to Ida Grove (5). One buffalo was seen in 1863 one and one-half miles south and three miles west of Sac City, but it plunged through a slough and escaped. The same man reported that he heard of five being killed near Lake City in 1862 (4).

Elk or Wapiti (*Cervus canadensis*). All the earliest settlers united in saying that elk were plentiful. They were found from solitary individuals to five hundred in a herd. This large herd was seen running seven miles north of Fonda. It covered two acres of ground and could be heard three miles away (4). The elk scattered out in summer time but in October herded together, remaining in herds until spring (4). In case of storms in winter they took refuge in reed and rush grown ponds, where the reeds and rushes were ten feet or more in height. At other times they would lie on the highest hills (3).

An elk that swam Wall lake from the north in 1855 was shot by Hugh Cory's father before it recovered from its exhaustion enough to leave the water (3). The elk were an important source of meat of the earliest settlers (1), their place being taken by deer later. Elk horns could be picked up by the wagon load in 1856 (1). One man captured three calves, running one down afoot, and raised them to over one year old (4). The last elk in Sac county was a herd of about forty, which was seen in October, 1869, and went from east of Storm lake, south through Sac county, crossing the "Goosepond" at Wall Lake (4).

Quotation from the "Biographical and Historical Record of Greene and Carroll Counties of Iowa," published in 1887 by the Lewis Publishing Company, of Chicago. About Greene county: "Game such as deer and elk was in great abundance until the winter of 1855-56. The snows of that winter were so deep that it was impossible for them to escape the pursuit of men and dogs, and the number destroyed seems almost incredible. It is said that they were overtaken by men, boys, and even women, and beaten to death with clubs. Since then there has scarcely been an elk or deer seen within the county. Their rapid and sudden disappearance astonished everyone."

Quotation about Carroll county, from same publication: "When the first settlers came, deer, elk and antelope were not plentiful, the Indians having hunted them down and thinned their numbers. Still venison could be had without much trouble, and deer became annually more plentiful for several years.

"Antelope were occasionally seen but soon disappeared."

Indirect quotation from another county history of Carroll county. On June 7, 1864, a buffalo was shot in Carroll county.

Deer (*Odocoileus americanus*). There were many deer till 1855-56, when in snow about three feet deep on the level, the wolves and men killed nearly all (3). Another man said that there were practically no deer for four or five years after this winter; then the deer increased and were most numerous from 1865 to 1870. He further stated that one hunter killed thirty deer as fast as he could shoot, at Mason's grove in Crawford county; and that over one hundred and fifty were killed by the settlers of that grove during the winter of 1855-56. The saddles (two hind quarters) of these deer were sold for fifty cents each in Sioux City (4).

The deer stayed on the prairies and hid in the rushes and tall grass around the ponds in summer, and took refuge in the hollows and cuts of the hills in winter (7). If there were any deer in the county they were always to be found between the Boyer river and Indian creek where these come nearest to each other (4). Four deer were killed near Lake View in 1880 (6), probably the last in the southern part of the county, although one was killed about 1890 in northern Sac county by George Cory, Tom Gary, and the Basler boys (3).

Antelope (*Antilocapra americana*). I found no definite records for Sac county. See the previous quotation about game conditions in Carroll county.

Otter (*Lutra canadensis*). Otter were plentiful. Wall lake looked as if sled runners had passed all over it in the winter of 1855 so numerous were the otter slides in the snow (3). They were most plentiful in 1856 and one man reported trapping five in one day. For these he received \$2.50 to \$3 apiece (4). An otter was caught near Sac City in 1912 and it is probable that a very few still exist along the Raccoon river (2).

Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*). Raccoon were common. Mr. F. M. Cory took twelve from an abandoned beaver hole in the bank of the Raccoon river in the winter of 1855-56 (3). In 1857 their pelts were worth 50 to 75 cents apiece. The raccoon is now rare but occasionally one is captured. Two were taken near Sac City in the winter of 1913-14. One was captured near Wall Lake, in a corn shock, about 1910.

Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*). One black bear was chased by Jim Butler and two other hunters on horseback from south of Wall lake to the Boyer river in 1855, but the bear escaped (4). "I found a bear skeleton at Pond grove in Buena Vista county" (4).

Mink (*Mustela vison letifera* Hollister). Specimen in the Smith collection. Mink were more abundant in early days than now, according to one man (4); and of about the same abundance as now, according to another man (2). Another observer reports mink most common about 1905 (8). They were more common at that time than now (1916) according to my observations. One man caught ten mink in one day along about a mile of the Raccoon river in early days (3).

Fisher (*Mustela pennantii*). I found no direct records for Sac county. "I saw a few fisher in the later '50's and traded for two skins" (1). This man's trading territory was principally north of Sac county. "In 1862, I followed a track in Calhoun county, which was twice as large as a mink's and of the same style, which I think was a fisher's" (4).

Weasel (*Mustela longicauda longicauda*). There are two specimens in the Smith collection. Weasels are only tolerably common now. I have always found individuals trapped after cold weather started, to be white in color. I have also found much

variation in size, some being twice as large as others. Weasels have always had about the same abundance as at present, according to two observers (4, 8).

Badger (*Taxidea taxus*). There is a specimen in the Smith collection, which was captured when it was small and was raised as a pet until the approach of the first winter after its capture. Badgers were common all over the prairies until about 1870 but there were none in the timber (3). Other men reported them common (2, 4). A few badger remain yet. One of my neighbors trapped one near Wall Lake in the winter of 1913-14. Some are still found in the hills south of this town, according to reports given in the summer of 1916 by farmers living in the vicinity. In the years 1911 and 1912 a badger dug many holes in the pasture and fields of my father's farm while it was pursuing thirteen-lined and Franklin's spermophiles.

Large Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mesomelas avia*). Specimen in the Smith collection. These are rare at the present day, and there are ten or more little spotted skunks to one large striped skunk. In early days they were found all over the prairie and in the timber (3). One man saw twelve taken from one hole (4). One man reports them not common about 1870 but that they became common fifteen to eighteen years later (8).

Little Spotted Skunk (*Spilogale interupta*). This skunk is commonly called "civet cat." The first civet cats were trapped in 1858, but they must have been at Grant grove before (3). They did not spread out from the timber and become plentiful until about 1890 to 1900 (8, 2). They are now common in both the prairie and timbered portions of the country. About 1905 I trapped thirty-two in one year on my father's farm.

Red Fox, Cross Fox, Silver Fox (*Vulpes fulva fulva*). Red fox were common before 1880 to 1885. About this date there was brought to Sac City a pack of hounds, which ran nearly all the foxes out of the country (2). The red foxes and varieties all stayed on the prairie and not in the timber, in the early days (3). The same man reported that many foxes were killed by the use of strychnine (3). In 1864 one man and his partners trapped thirty-seven foxes. A few of them were cross foxes worth \$5 each; one, a silver fox which was worth \$15; and the others were red foxes worth \$1 to \$1.50 each (4). My father saw a red fox near Wall Lake in 1875 (7). An occasional red

fox is still trapped, and the newspapers usually report the capture of about one a year in various parts of the county. The last one reported was captured by Jim Basler near Sac City in the winter of 1913-14 (3).

Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinerogentus*). One man only (3), reported gray fox, and he stated that they were as common as red fox, the same size, and of similar habits, the only difference being color.

Swift Fox (*Vulpes velox*). Reports as to the abundance of this fox vary. One man (1) states that they were rather plentiful; another, that they were scarcer than red fox. This man (4) said that they stayed mostly on the prairie and that their track was about the size of a cat track. He caught six in 1858 and never saw any more. Another man (2) told of a small "red" fox about one-half the size of a common red fox and a trifle lighter in color, which he called the "samson" fox. Still another man reported trapping one at Correction pond in 1862 (3). He said they stayed on the prairie and were about one-half the size of the red fox. This same man (3) reported a "fiste wolf," which he described as exactly like a prairie wolf or coyote, gray in color, but only about the size of a house cat, and making a track about the size of a cat track. He stated that it lived in muskrat houses in winter and on the hills in summer, feeding on prairie chickens and mice. He trapped the last one in 1857 and had seen twenty or thirty skins which were worth 25 to 30 cents apiece. I could not identify this animal from the description, and wrote the Biological Survey. Mr. E. W. Nelson's reply stated that it must have been a gray phase of the swift fox.

Coyote (*Canis latrans*). Coyotes were reported very common at the time of the first settlement (2, 3, 4). One man reported that the coyotes hunted and killed red foxes but did not eat them (4). After the country settled up the coyotes decreased very much in numbers, but a few have always persisted. Of late years they seem to be increasing in numbers. Reports appear in the newspapers of from one to three dens of cubs being dug out every spring, with the female only occasionally captured. I trapped three in the winter of 1913-14 near Wall Lake, and two others were trapped in other parts of the county, according to newspaper reports. At the present day the coyotes



occasionally kill sheep, young pigs, calves and chickens; but they do not make this a habitual practice, as they live largely on cottontail rabbits.

Timber Wolf (*Canis nublis*). The timber or large gray wolf was very rare. One was killed in 1859 (1), one in 1867 (4), and one in 1868 (3). One man stated that the timber wolves used to catch foxes and that they would eat them when they were caught in his traps (3).

Black Wolf (*Canis nublis*). The black wolves were said to have a smaller body (4) but longer legs than the timber wolf (3). In 1858 F. M. Cory found a den and captured one of the pups which he kept a year. This was the last black wolf seen (3). My father and mother both reported a black wolf killed in Clinton county in early days or along in the 1860's.

Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*). All four men reported Canada lynxes rare (1, 2, 3, 4). Three were trapped in 1869 and one in 1875 (3).

Bob Cat or Wild Cat (*Lynx ruffus ruffus*). Bob cats were reported as being more common than lynx (2, 4). One man reported many, and that the last one was killed in 1885 (3).

Panther or Puma (*Felis concolor*). I found no definite records of the puma, but was told that "Winnebago John," an old Indian, used to recount adventures with pumas (9), presumably along the Raceoon river. Another man reported rumors of their being seen along this river, although I do not know whether the report referred definitely to Sac county, or not (11).

Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*). This animal was rare. One man reported seeing one that was caught at Grant City in 1857 (3). One other person reported hearing of them (9).

Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*). Opossums were found at Grant and Lee groves when the first settlers came (3). For many years they were rare, first appearing at Sac City about 1900 (2). I saw two that were trapped near Wall Lake in 1907 and one was captured near the same town in 1911. They are spreading out over the prairie wherever there is a little timber.

Prairie Hare or White-tailed Jack Rabbit (*Lepus campestris*). The earliest settlers report that there were no jack rabbits present at the time of the settlement of the county (2, 3, 4). The first record I find is of one seen in the southern half of the county in 1868 or 1869 (11). One man at Lake View saw and

killed his first jack rabbit in 1879, and did not see another for five years (6). They were first seen at Sac City in 1880 (2, 3). They became numerous about 1890 to 1900 (7). They are now common but their numbers seem to vary over a term of years, as they are more common some years than the next series of years. When I visited some of my cousins in Clinton county about 1905, they reported that jack rabbits were just beginning to be captured occasionally in their locality.

Cottontail (*Lepus floridanus mearnsi*). Cottontails or gray rabbits were always common, but in early days were always to be found in the brush and timber in winter, on account of the numerous coyotes (2). Today, almost none can be found in the timber in winter, while they are common in the cornstalk fields (2). In the vicinity of Wall Lake they are usually found in the corn fields but in severe weather they often seek shelter about farm buildings. They are also numerous in the long marsh grass of the "Goosepond" in winter.

Jumping Mouse (*Zapus hudsonius campestris*). One man reported a "kangaroo" mouse which had a tail about eight inches long and was found in the fields (4). Another man reported an extremely long-tailed mouse (2).

Pocket Gopher (*Geomys busarius*). In early days the pocket gophers were not as numerous as now (8). Before the prairie was broken up, the pocket gophers were found in the morning glory patches (2). Today, the pocket gophers are numerous in clover and timothy fields, and often are found in pastures or along roadsides. I have found spotted skunks, weasels, and minks living in freshly opened pocket gopher tunnels, and I believe that all these species prey upon the pocket gophers.

Muskrat (*Fiber zibethicus*). Specimen in the Smith collection. Muskrats were very abundant at the time of settlement. The skins were worth from 8 to 10 cents each in 1857 and from 12 to 15 cents each in 1870, when Shelt Tiberghien and two partners trapped 6,250 musk rats from October, 1870, to May, 1871. The highest day's catch was eighty-one rats (4). A number of the early settlers could not have lived except for the muskrat trapping. A man could make good wages at 10 cents each, with the storekeepers willing to accept furs the same as they do eggs at the present day (8). The muskrats were called the "saviour of the people," and taxes were paid from the proceeds of trapping in the days before the railroad furnished a market for

bulkier products (2). Today, muskrats are fairly common along the Raccoon river and the Boyer, also along some of the smaller creeks and about Wall lake and the "Goosepond." In the winter of 1915-16, after the "Goosepond" was full of water all summer, a local trapper stated that over two thousand muskrats were trapped.

Meadow Mouse (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*). These were common in early days (4). Today, they are found in every slough or field where there is a rank growth of vegetation. In the winter they often infest stacks of clover hay and do much damage. They do not frequent corn fields, except sometimes in winter, and where there is a rank growth about the edges.

Prairie White-footed Mouse (*Persyscus maniculatus bairdi*). This mouse is very common in corn fields at all times of the year. It is also found in stubble fields, but to a lesser extent. While disking a fall-plowed clover stubble in the spring, I have disked these mice out of the ground in the center of a thirty acre field. I also saw a Franklin gull capture and swallow entire, one of these mice, when I was disking the same field.

Brown or Norway Rat (*Mus decumanus*). The first barn rat came in a box of goods from New York state in the spring of 1858. It escaped and was trapped the next fall in Cory's grove (4). Brown rats were next reported in 1868 (2) and 1870 (3).

House Mouse (*Mus musculus*). I obtained no first data for the house mouse, but they were here in 1870 (8).

Beaver (*Castor canadensis*). Beaver were very common. The dams they built across the Raccoon river were so numerous (about one-half mile apart) that there was slack water nearly all the way up the river (1, 3, 4). "My partner and I caught the last beaver, thirteen of them, on the 'Coon' river straight east of Lake View in 1870 (4). This was the last dam built on the Raccoon river (4). The last beaver on the Boyer river were seven which were trapped in 1886 by Mr. Levey, to the west of Wall Lake (7, 8). One man trapped six beaver in seven nights with one trap (1). The beaver steadily decreased from the time of the first settlers (4). One pioneer said that a man on the Maple river in Ida county protected beaver and that there were always beaver there (3). I know a local trapper who reported beaver along this river in 1904.

Woodchuck or Ground Hog (*Marmota monax*). There were always woodchucks at Grant and Lee groves (3), but they never spread out much until about 1905, when they appeared at Sac City (2). They have now spread through the timber (2) and my father trapped one near Wall Lake August 27, 1912.

Gray Ground Squirrel or Franklin's Spermophile (*Citellus franklini*). Specimen in the Smith collection. It is now common in clover and timothy fields; and when the hay is cut it removes to the grain fields and digs new burrows. It is very rarely found in pastures. My father has seen one of these squirrels rob a meadow lark's nest, and one of our neighbors who had moved to Saskatchewan, Canada, reported seeing a squirrel of this species sucking a wild duck's egg. This species was not as common in early days as it is now (4, 8).

Striped "Gopher" or Ground Squirrel or Thirteen-lined Spermophile (*Citellus tridecemlineatus*). This species also was not as common in early days as it is now (4, 8). It is now common, frequenting pastures where there is short grass, and a more or less permanent sod, almost entirely. I have seen it catch and eat grasshoppers.

Prairie Dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*). One man (2) reported a prairie dog town of about twenty burrows in Jackson township in 1900. There were no other prairie dogs reported and I would consider it probable that these were the descendants of escaped pets.

Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*). Chipmunks were very common in the timber at first settlement. One man told of five in one bush (4). They are still found in the timber along the Raccoon river but I would consider them only tolerably common.

Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*). None were reported for Sac county but one man (3) reported some at Jefferson in Greene county in 1860. My father said that in the '60's, there were numerous gray squirrels and no fox squirrels about Charlotte, Clinton county, Iowa; and that in 1915 when he returned there for a visit, fox squirrels were numerous, but there were no gray squirrels.

Western Fox Squirrel (*Sciurus ludovicianus*). The early settlers report this species as rare at first (2, 4). Only in late years have they become common and started to spread over the prairie to the farmers' groves. They first appeared at Wall Lake about 1904 and are now common (1917). I have shot one

specimen on which the reddish hair on the underparts was replaced with black, and I saw another such specimen at Sac City.

Flying Squirrel (*Sciuropterus volans*). A few flying squirrels were said to be found in every grove at the time of settlement (2, 3), and some are still to be found (2).

Common Shrew (*Sorex personatus haydeni*). On July 13, 1917, I obtained a specimen of this shrew which Mr. Guy Martin captured in a clover field, three miles west of Sac City. It was identified by Mr. E. W. Nelson of the U. S. Biological Survey.

Short-tailed Shrew (*Blarina brevicauda*). This shrew is common in the vicinity of Wall Lake. After heavy and prolonged beating rains, I have often found them lying dead on our lawn. I have also seen domestic chickens kill them, not without fierce and shrill squeaking on the part of the shrew, however. Its ridges are more commonly found in pastures and hayfields, but only rarely in corn fields until after cultivation ceases.

Prairie Mole (*Scalops aquaticus machrinus*). Specimen in the Smith collection. This species is quite common in the vicinity of Wall Lake. I have found it principally about farm yards, fences, pastures, and other undisturbed places. Several times in the spring I have found their dead bodies upon the surface of the ground, together with evidence that they had been making tunnels through the snow drifts. This evidence was in the form of channels in the remnants of ice left from snow-drifts. On one December day I found a mole crawling over the surface of the ground although this was frozen to a depth of two or three inches. At another time I heard a shrill squeaking and upon investigating, found two moles fighting just below the surface. One was soon forced out upon the surface, but immediately started to burrow under again.

Red Bat (*Lasiurus borealis*). This bat is common in the vicinity of Wall Lake. I have captured six or eight specimens which I identified by the aid of the North American Fauna on bats. I have usually found them hanging in a tree or bush a few feet from the ground. The first specimen I kept a record of was captured July 5, 1908.

Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*). I captured a specimen of this bat August 23, 1908, and have seen two others of whose identity I was certain. It is rather common.

#### WALL LAKE.