

Ungwallriat – ANIMALS



The land mammals of the Kodiak Archipelago have supported Alutiiq/Sugpiaq families for millennia. In addition to food, they provide materials—hides for clothing and bags, sinew for sewing and lashing, gut for waterproof raingear and containers, and bone for tools. Yet the animals people harvest have changed over time.

The Kodiak Archipelago’s rugged landscape was covered by glacial ice until about 10,000 years ago. As the ice retreated, plants colonized the land and created forage for animals. Biologists believe that some mammals reached the archipelago by swimming or traveling over sea ice. Ground squirrels may have hitched a ride with human travelers, stowing away in boats. For other species, like moose and caribou, water and ice prohibited colonization. For most of Alutiiq history, Kodiak had just seven types of land mammals—brown bears, bats, ermine, foxes, ground squirrels, river otters, and voles.

In the 20th century, biologists introduced more species to create economic opportunities. They released deer and elk for subsistence harvesting, mountain goats for sport hunting, and furbearers like beavers and hares for trapping. Some of the animals thrived in the cool wet environment. Others died.

As populations of introduced species grew, Alutiiq people began harvesting them for food and material. Deer are one of the most important. When American laws restricted bear harvesting, venison replaced bear meat at Alutiiq dinner tables. It remains a popular wild food.

Kodiak Mammals and their History

Introduced	Animal	Outcome	Introduced	Animal	Outcome
Endemic	Arctic Ground Squirrel— <i>Spermophilus parryii</i>	Successful	1928–29	Roosevelt Elk— <i>Cervus elaphus roosevelti</i>	Successful
Endemic	Ermine (short-tailed weasel)— <i>Mustela erminea</i>	Successful	1934	Snowshoe Hare— <i>Lepus americanus</i>	Successful
Endemic	Fox— <i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Successful	1930s, 1970s	Raccoon— <i>Procyon lotor</i>	Failed
Endemic	Kodiak Brown Bear— <i>Ursus arctos middendorffi</i>	Successful	1952	Mink— <i>Neovison vison</i>	Failed
Endemic	Little Brown Bat— <i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Successful	1952	Red Squirrel— <i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>	Successful
Endemic	North American River Otter— <i>Lontra canadensis</i>	Successful	1952	Marten— <i>Martes americana</i>	Successful
Endemic	Tundra Vole— <i>Microtus oeconomus</i>	Successful	1952–1953	Mountain Goat— <i>Oreamnos americanus</i>	Successful
1890s, 1924, 1934	Sitka Blacktail Deer— <i>Odocoileus hemionus sitkensis</i>	Successful	1964–1967	Dall Sheep— <i>Ovis dalli</i>	Failed
1924	Reindeer— <i>Rangifer tarandus</i>	Successful	1966–1967	Moose— <i>Alces alces</i>	Failed
1925, 1929	Beaver— <i>Castor canadensis</i>	Successful	1984	European Hog— <i>Sus scrofa</i>	Failed
1925	Muskrat— <i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	Successful	1980s; 2010s	Plains Bison— <i>Bison bison</i>	Successful

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Trouble in Paradise: Conflict over Introduced Wildlife on Alaska’s Kodiak Archipelago, 2012, by Travis Tennessen, Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison.