

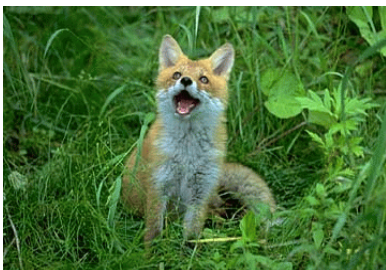


Wildlife Diseases FACTSHEET

Rabies in North America

What is rabies?

Rabies is a deadly viral disease of the brain spread by the bite of infected mammals. Across North America there are numerous different types (variants) of this virus which are spread by very specific kinds of animals. In this province, it is most commonly seen in Labrador, where red and arctic foxes are responsible for its spread. In addition to this fox variant, we have had one reported case on the island of Newfoundland that came from a bat.



Red fox



Arctic fox

These different variants will be discussed in this factsheet with emphasis on the increasing importance of the raccoon variant to Canada.

The known variants in Canada & the US

In Canada & the US, there are numerous known variants of the rabies virus in land-dwelling mammals. All of these cause the same disease and are a threat to any mammal they bite however the disease only persists as a reservoir within its own species or those closely related.



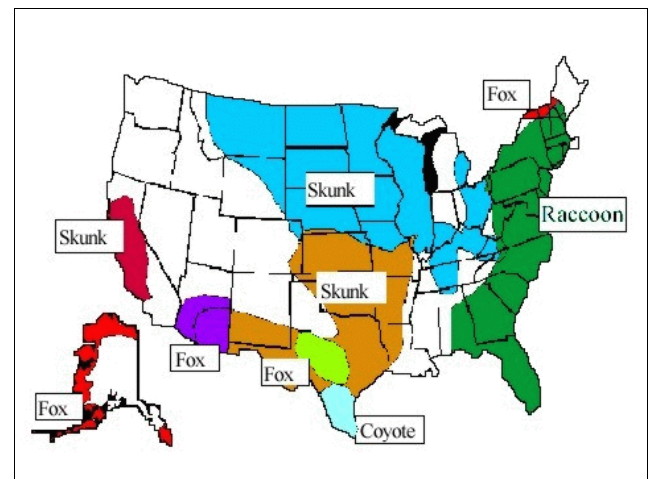
Skunk



Coyote

These terrestrial variants include:

Animal	Name of variant	Region
Skunk	South Central	southern plains
	North Central	northern plains south into US
	California	California
Dog	Dog/coyote	south Texas
	Sonora dog	Texas
Fox	Gray fox	Texas & Arizona
	Arctic fox	Canada, Alaska, New England
Raccoon	Raccoon	eastern US, ON, NB



Major Terrestrial Rabies Variants in the US

There is no such map currently available for Canada.

Copies of this and other publications may be obtained from the Department's Regional Offices, the factsheet author or by visiting our website at <http://www.gov.nl.ca/agric/>.



There are also numerous bat variants including the Silver-haired Bat variant and Big Brown Bat variant. Their distribution across North America is less well understood. It is generally considered that wherever the actual bat species is, there will also be a threat of them carrying the virus. The different bat variants are the most common source for human rabies in North America.



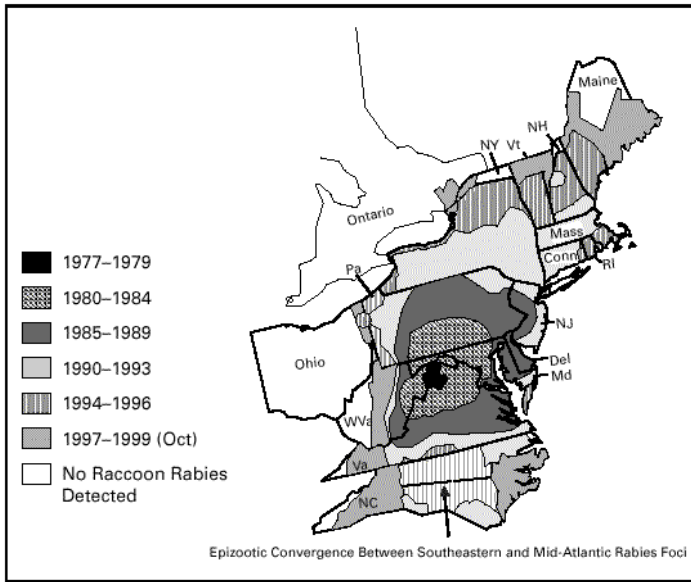
Big Brown Bats



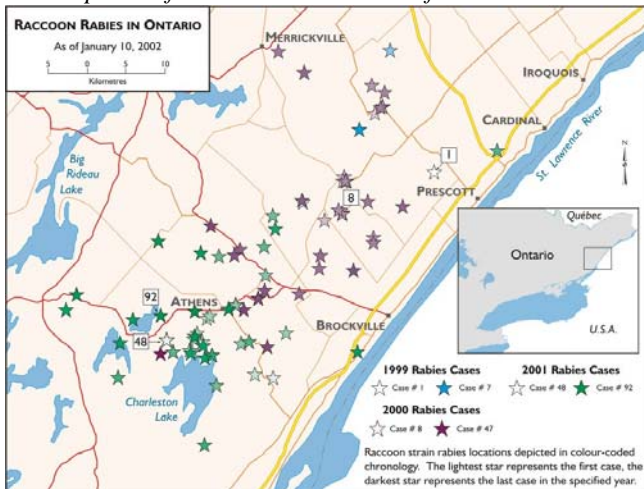
Raccoon

Raccoon Rabies

This particular variant was established in the southeastern US, particularly Florida, prior to 1950. In 1977 a new outbreak occurred in West Virginia presumably due to the movement of Florida raccoons to West Virginia for hunting purposes.

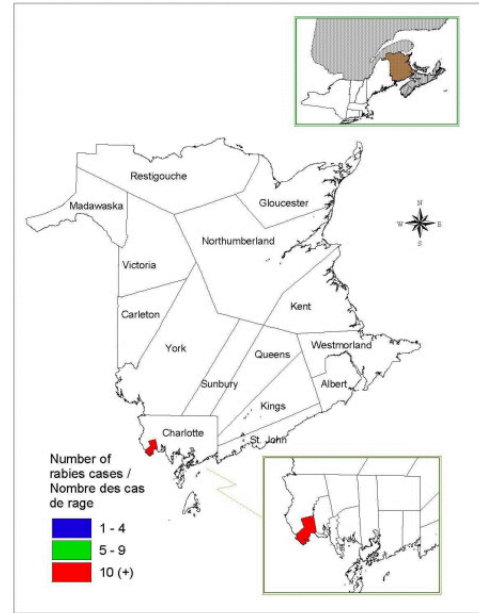


Spread of Raccoon Rabies in US from 1977-99



Raccoon Rabies in Ontario

Since the 1970's, it has established itself throughout eastern US and has crossed into Canada in southern Ontario and New Brunswick.



Raccoon Rabies in New Brunswick

It is not known how much further the raccoon variant will spread, this will depend upon the availability of habitat, and control measures to reduce or eliminate this disease. As this province has no current raccoon population there is a low risk of it entering and establishing itself. Raccoons do live in Cape Breton, however, and are able to travel undetected on vehicles so individual animals could cross over. In September 2002, a raccoon travelled from Nova Scotia to near St. John's in a closed container showing that such movement is possible.

Where can I look for more information?

All current and historical records of rabies in this province as well as links to other informative websites are maintained on our departmental website (www.gov.nl.ca/agric under Animal Diseases). In addition the author can be of direct assistance.

Image credits: Images come from the governments of New Brunswick, the North West Territories and Ontario as well as the US Centre for Disease Control.

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