

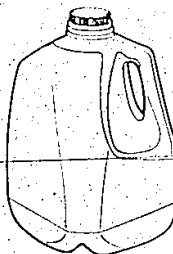
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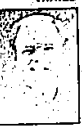
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Think mink — Michigan's full of them

NATURE TRAILS

TIMOTHY NOWICKI

If we started to play a game of association, and I mentioned "mink," your first thought would probably be "coot." Because many people have never seen a mink before, they might associate them with wild remote areas of wilderness. Actually mink are found throughout Michigan in both upper and lower peninsulas.

In fact, I had the opportunity to see one at Heritage Park in Farmington Hills recently. Though typically a nocturnal animal, this individual was active in mid-afternoon on a bright sunny day. It was looping along the bank of a branch of the Rouge River that runs through the park.

Wetland areas are favored habitats of the mink. Since wetlands are difficult to traverse, not many people are in the proper place to see a mink, especially if they are active at night. In wetlands, whether it is a lakeshore, river, swamp or marsh, mink are able to find adequate food and shelter.

Root tangles along river banks provide good shelter for temporary dens or dens for raising young. Mink may settle in an area for a couple days and then leave to search for food. A menu for a mink includes many choices. They will catch mice, moles, rabbit, squirrel, frogs, crayfish, coot, bird eggs, snakes, fish and an occasional insect. Muskrats are one of its most favored foods.

Mink are members of the weasel family and are long and narrow like the typical weasel one thinks of. But they are larger than the short-tailed, long-tailed and least weasel.

They do not change to white in winter as do the three species just mentioned. Their size does allow them to prey on animals as large as adult muskrats. Muskrat cannot escape into the water to avoid the pursuit of a mink, because the semi-webbed feet of mink allow it to swim proficiently. Mink often capture fish under water by swimming after them.

A mink's rich brown color may vary to black and to one of 12 other color variations recognized. The brown of a typical wild animal provides a sharp contrast to the white under the chin that is characteristic of mink. Fortunately I did not experience its musky odor, which according to some, puts a skunk's odor to shame. It is fortunate that there are some seldom seen animals still around where habitats are adequate for their survival.

Tim Nowicki is a naturalist at Independence Oaks County Park in Oakland County. He lives in Livonia.

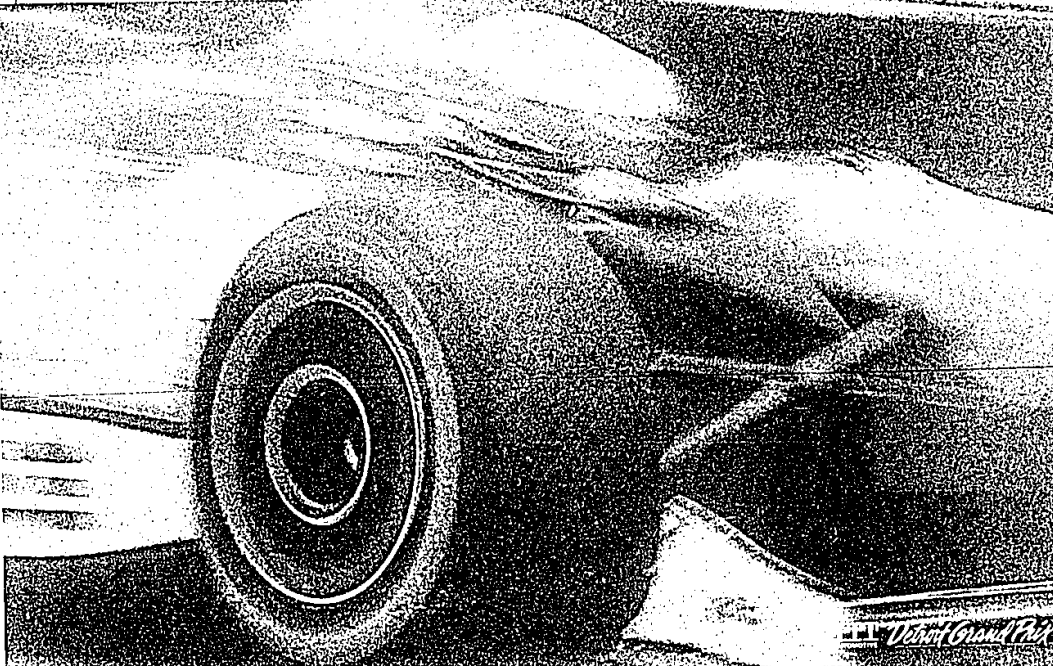
Grants boost OU eye research projects

Oakland University faculty researchers benefitted from \$588,445 in federal and private research grants during March, according to trustee reports.

The grants, which formed a substantial portion of the \$835,653 in total gifts and grants reported for March, went primarily to research into eye disorders. The National Eye Institute gave an additional \$205,000 to Venkat Reddy, director of the Eye Research Institute, in support of a "Core Grant for Vision Research."

part of a national study on age-related eye disease; the National Eye Institute gave an additional \$205,000 to Venkat Reddy, director of the Eye Research Institute, in support of a "Core Grant for Vision Research."

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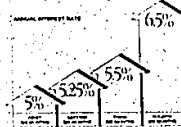
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