

## Differentiation of the masked shrew (*Sorex cinereus*) and pygmy shrew (*S. hoyi*)

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Although many studies forgo differentiation between masked shrews (*Sorex cinereus*) and pygmy shrews (*S. hoyi*), these two species can be identified in the field using a number of morphological differences. The most reliable method is dentition. Masked shrews have 4 visible unicuspid teeth in the upper tooth row whereas pygmy shrews have 3 (Fig. 1). These teeth can be viewed by pulling back the upper gum. However, live shrews quickly expire when handled extensively and this is best done on animals that are already deceased. A hand lens may be needed to aid in viewing these small teeth.

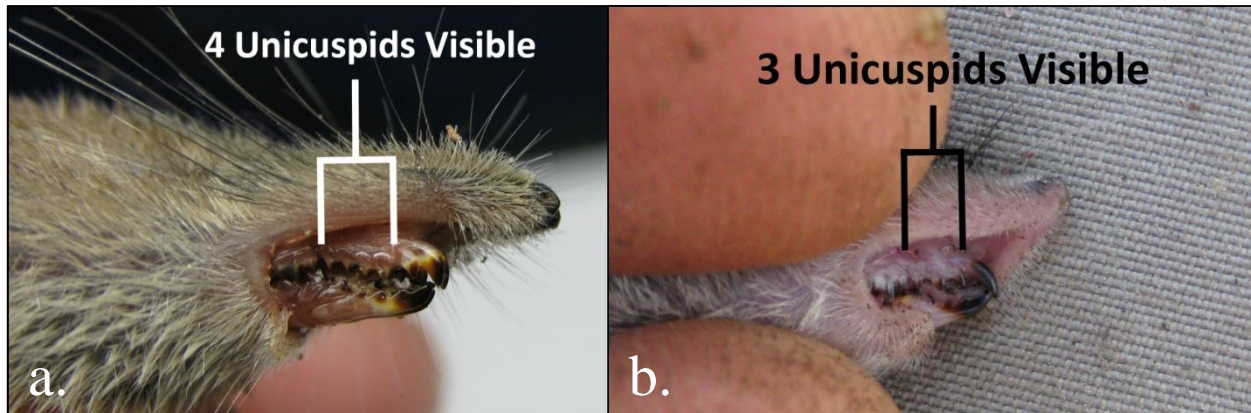


Figure 1. Unicuspid teeth of masked shrew (a) and pygmy shrew (b). Note that teeth are visible on un-skinned shrews.

Masked and pygmy shrews can also be identified by tail length. Tails should be measured from the base of the tail to the end of the caudal vertebra, excluding the hairs at the tip of the tail. Masked shrews have tail lengths  $> 33$  mm and pygmy shrews have tails  $\leq 33$  mm in length (Figure



Figure 2. Wisconsin shrews of the genus *Sorex*. From left to right: pygmy shrew, masked shrew, arctic shrew, and water shrew.

2). Masked shrews tend to be larger than pygmy shrews, but this does not always hold true across age classes (Fig. 2). Masked shrews also tend to have a browner hue to their pelage than the grayer pelage of pygmy shrews (Fig. 2 & 3). In addition, pygmy shrews have a more obtuse rostrum than masked shrews (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Dorsal views of the pygmy shrew (left) and masked shrew (right). Note the more obtuse rostrum of the pygmy shrew.