



[Dire Shrew](#) © Heather Frazier.

[I rewatched *The Killer Shrews* recently, and it's a much smarter movie than most of its creature feature ilk. It has themes of selective breeding, genetics and ecological collapse that are pretty state-of-the-art for the late 50s. Unfortunately, it is talky and dull for vast stretches of the run time, and the shrews themselves (dogs with masks or hand puppets) look pretty silly. It's a movie that could actually benefit from a remake.]

Dire Shrew

This grey-furred animal looks something like a cross between a mouse and a wolf. Its eyes are nearly invisible beneath the fur on its pointed head. Its long legs end in hand-like paws and a long naked tail twitches as if in anticipation.

Voracious predators of the forests and plains, dire shrews fight with a savagery that belies their small size. Dire shrews are strict carnivores with a taste for almost anything they can subdue, although they have a seeming fondness for giant vermin. The metabolism of a dire shrew is remarkably fast—a dire shrew must consume nearly its body weight in prey each day or begin to starve. As such, only the most productive environments can support any number of dire shrews. Dire shrews do not have the capacity to run long distances in pursuit of prey—they use ambush and overwhelming numbers to take down meals as large as a bison. If prey does not immediately succumb, dire shrews will often retreat and shadow their victim as it succumbs to the effect of multiple venomous bites. Dire shrew venom causes swelling, immense pain and eventually complete paralysis. Stubborn and fearless, dire shrews drive other predators out of their territories and have little hesitation to attack humanoids. Although their eyesight is poor, dire shrews more than compensate with keen hearing, a good sense of smell and the ability to echolocate in a manner similar to bats. Dire shrews are about the size of a mid-sized dog, standing about eighteen inches at the shoulder and weighing forty pounds.

Dire shrews are found in a wide range of habitats and temperatures, although they are not as common in warmer latitudes. Their rapid metabolisms require a lot of water to keep maintained, and therefore most dire shrews are found within a short distance of lakes and rivers. Dire shrew society is somewhat similar to that found in lions and apes—a single adult male presides over a drove of females and their children. Male shrews are driven from the family upon reaching maturity and brothers will often form small packs in search of territory and females. Fights for dominance are uncommon, but oftentimes fatal—dire shrews have no ability to resist their own venom. The losers of such battles are generally devoured.

Dire Shrews as Animal Companions

Starting Statistics: **Size** Small; **Speed** 40 ft.; **AC** +1 natural armor; **Attack** bite (1d4); **Ability Scores** Str 12, Dex 19, Con 8, Int 2, Wis 13, Cha 3; **Special Qualities** low-light vision, scent

4th-Level Advancement: **Ability Scores** Str +2, Con +2; **Special Attacks** poison (*frequency* 1 round (6), *effect* 1d3 Dex damage, *cure* 1 save, Con-based DC +2); **Special Qualities** blindsense 30 ft.

Dire Shrew CR 2

XP 600

N Small animal

Init +8; **Senses** blindsense 30 ft., low-light vision, Perception +9, scent

Defense

AC 16, touch 15, flat-footed 12 (+1 size, +4 Dex, +1 natural)

hp 18 (4d8)

Fort +4, **Ref** +8, **Will** +2

Offense

Speed 40 ft.

Melee bite +6 (1d4+3 plus poison)

Statistics

Str 14, **Dex** 19, **Con** 10, **Int** 2, **Wis** 13, **Cha** 3

Base Attack +3; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 18 (22 against trip)**Feats** Improved Initiative, Skill Focus (Perception)

Skills Perception +9, Stealth +12, Survival +2 (+6 tracking by scent), Swim +6; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Survival when tracking by scent

Ecology

Environment temperate and cold forests and plains

Organization solitary, pair or drove (3-10 plus 50% young dire shrews)

Treasure incidental

Special Abilities

Poison (Ex) Injury—bite; *save* Fort DC 14; *frequency* 1/round for 6 rounds; *damage* 1d3 Dexterity damage; *cure* 1 save. The save DC is Constitution based and includes a +2 racial bonus