



# Vertebrate Pest Identification Key: Field Rodents

This key is to help landowners and property managers properly identify common vertebrate pests in Montana's fields. This key is not exhaustive. Questions and images can be submitted to [svantassel@mt.gov](mailto:svantassel@mt.gov) or by calling 406-538-3004. Additional resources may be found at the end of the document.

## Ground Squirrels

- Activity—Daytime; Mar-Oct



Figure 1. Richardson's ground squirrel. Columbian ground squirrels look similar except that they have a rusty colored nose.



Figure 2. Range of the Columbian ground squirrel (blue), and Richardson's ground squirrel (pink) and where the ranges overlap (purple).



Figure 3. Holes are 2-2.5 inches wide. Excavated soil will be present in front of some holes.



Figure 4. Trails between holes average 2 inches in width.

## Moles

- Moles do not occur in Montana.





Figure 5. Eastern mole.



Figure 6. Mole run.

### Pocket Gophers

- Activity- Daytime/Nighttime/Year-round.
- Rarely come to the surface during daylight hours.
- Eat roots of plants, especially alfalfa.



Figure 7. Pocket gopher. Note the blunt nose, exposed incisors, small ears and eyes.



Figure 8. Typical kidney-shaped mound created by a pocket gopher.





Figure 9. Example of an area inundated with pocket gopher mounds.

## Prairie Dog

- Activity- daytime/year-round
- Live in communities called “towns”.



Figure 10. Prairie dog in alert posture.



Figure 11. Prairie dog burrow and mound. Holes can be 4-12 inches wide and may have a dirt plume (shown).

## Voles (aka meadow mice)

- Activity- Daytime/Nighttime/Year-round



Figure 12. Meadow vole. Note the blunt nose, small ears and eyes.



Figure 13. Trails cut through grass caused by voles.





Figure 14. Cluster of vole holes in the grass; about an inch wide.



Figure 15. Gnawed bark caused by voles; typically below the snow line.

## Additional Information

For technical assistance on the management of vertebrate pests, visit <https://agr.mt.gov/Vertebrate-Pests> or contact Stephen M. Vantassel, Vertebrate Pest Specialist, Montana Department of Agriculture, 625 NE Main St. Suite 3, Lewistown, MT 59457: 406-538-3004 [svantassel@mt.gov](mailto:svantassel@mt.gov).

**Photo Credits:** Richardson's ground squirrel: Szmurlo/Wikimedia. Range maps: Montana Field Guide <http://fieldguide.mt.gov/>. Eastern mole: Bert Cash. Pocket gopher: Motomco. Vole: Japanese Tea/Wikimedia. All other photos: Stephen M. Vantassel.