Vertebrate Pest Identification Key: Field Rodents

This key is to help landowners and property managers properly identify common vertebrate pests in Montana's fields. The symbol (L) refers to the image in the column farthest to the left and (R) refers to the image in the middle of the page. This key is not exhaustive. Questions and images can be submitted to svantassel@mt.gov or by calling 406-538-3004. Additional resources may be found at the end of the document.

Ground Squirrels (GS)

- Active-Daytime; Mar-Oct
- (L) Richardson's GS. Columbian GS looks similar
- (R) Range of Columbian ground squirrel (Blue) & Richardson's ground squirrel (Pink). Range overlap (Purple)
- Holes- 2-2½ inches wide
- (L) Excavated soil outside many of the holes
- (R) Trails-2 inches wide
  Side note: Vole trails are less than 2 inches wide

Moles

- Moles do not occur in Montana
- (L) Eastern mole
- (R) Mole run

Pocket Gophers

- Activity—Daytime/Nighttime/Year-round
- Rarely come to the surface
- (L) Pocket gopher, blunt nose, exposed incisors, small ears and eyes
- (R) Create fan-shaped mounds. Fields look like the ground exploded. Eat roots of plants. Alfalfa is a favorite

Prairie Dog

- Activity—Daytime/Year-round
- (L) prairie dog in alert posture
- Live in communities called towns
- (R) Burrow holes can be 4-12 inches wide and may have a dirt plume (shown)

Voles (AKA Meadow Mice)

- Active-Daytime/Nighttime/Year-round
- (L) Meadow vole. Blunt nose, small eyes and ears, and short tail
- (R) Cut trails in the grass

- (L) Gnaw tree bark (typically below the snow line). Gnaw marks go in different directions whereas porcupine gnaw marks look like a herring bone pattern. Gnaw marks from rabbits occur at base of plants and are accompanied by round pellets
- (R) Holes (1-1½ inches wide) tend to cluster in fields

Additional Information

For technical assistance on the management of vertebrate pests, visit http://agr.mt.gov/agr/Programs/PestMgt/VertebratePest/ 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

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.