

# Voles

Voles, which are often confused with moles, are compact rodents with stocky bodies, short legs, and short tails. Their eyes are small and their ears are partially hidden. They are usually brown or gray, though many color variations exist. Their length ranges from 4 inches (10 cm) to 8 1/2 inches (20 cm). There are 23 species in the United States.

Voles occupy a wide variety of habitats. They prefer habitats with heavy ground cover of grasses, grasslike plants, or litter. They can also be found in orchards, windbreaks, and cultivated fields, especially when their populations are high. Unlike moles, voles eat a wide variety of plants, most frequently grasses and forbs. In the late summer and fall, they store seeds, tubers, bulbs, and rhizomes. They eat bark at times, primarily in fall and winter, and will eat crops, especially when their populations are high. Occasionally they will eat snails, insects and animal remains.

Like the mole, voles are active day and night, year-round. They do not hibernate. Their home range is usually 1/4 acre (0.1 ha) or less but varies with season, population density, habitat, food supply and other factors. Voles are semifossorial and construct many tunnels and surface runways with numerous burrow entrances. Voles may cause extensive damage to orchards, ornamentals, and tree plantings due to their girdling of seedlings and mature trees. Girdling damage usually occurs in fall and winter. Field crops may be damaged or completely destroyed by voles. They eat crops and also damage them when they build extensive runway and tunnel systems. These systems interfere with crop irrigation by displacing water and cause levees and checks to wash out.

They also can ruin lawns, golf courses, and ground cover. Vole girdling can be distinguished from that of other animals by the non-uniform gnaw marks that occur at various angles in irregular patches. Marks are about 1/8 inch (0.3 cm) wide, 3/8 inch (1.0 cm) long, and 1/16 inch (0.2cm) or more deep. The most easily identifiable sign of voles is an extensive surface runway system with numerous burrow openings. Methods for control and damage prevention include exclusion, cultural methods, such as, eliminating weeds, ground cover and litter around crops and lawns, and soil tillage. Frightening, repellents, toxicants, fumigant, trapping and shooting are also methods used. The methods that are effective are exclusion, on a small scale; cultural methods, such as eliminating weeds, ground cover, and litter; mowing and soil tillage.

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