

Mice and Voles

Grow with USask



House Mouse (*Mus Musculus*)

Description

Dusty gray colour, 2.5 – 4 inches long with a tail as long as it's body. Small head, slender body and moderately large ears. Eyes small and somewhat protruding.

House mice have adapted well to living indoors due to their excellent vision, smell and hearing. They can enter openings in a building that are only ¼ inch wide.

Damage

Since house mice are nocturnal their presence is usually indicated by droppings, gnaw marks, and urine odors. Droppings are ¼ inch long with pointed ends; dark color. Additionally, they will shred paper for nests from books and paper towels. House mouse damage holes are typically small, clean-cut and about ½ inch in diameter.

House mice do not girdle trees or damage vegetable gardens.

Diet

Cereal grains, meats and seeds. Inside homes house mice are attracted to high-calorie sweets and fatty foods (ie. peanut butter, soft cheese, marshmallows, gum drops, beef jerky). When female mice gather nesting materials in the fall and winter, dental floss, yarn and twine attract them to the trap. Tie the fabrics to the trigger, so the trap springs when mice pull on it.

Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus Maniculatus*)

Description

Reddish-brown to golden brown, white feet and chest, bi-colored tail. Four inches long with a 2.5 inch tail. Small head and body with large sparsely furred ears and large protruding black eyes.

The deer mouse (also known as field mouse or white-footed mouse) is not usually found in urban environments. They are most commonly found in rural areas inside grain silos, storage bins, barns, old cars, garages, ledges beneath decks, and around tree roots. These rodents are well-known carriers of the deadly Hantavirus which has caused numerous deaths in the United States.

Damage

Same as house mice. Deer mice also do not gnaw on trees or damage vegetable gardens.

Diet

Insects, nuts, seeds and berries. Recommended bait for deer mice include peanut butter, sunflower seeds, oatmeal, nesting material such as dental floss, gumdrops, chocolate, and crackers. Tying the bait to the trigger will prevent the rodent from licking or nibbling the bait and stealing it without setting off the trap.



House Mouse (*Mus Musculus*)



Deer Mouse (*Peromyscus Maniculatus*)



Voles (*Microtus sp.*)

Most common vole species found in North America are the meadow vole, prairie vole, long-tailed vole, pine vole, montane vole and woodland vole. (more than 150 species worldwide).

Description

Grayish brown colour, 4-7 inches long with stocky rounded bodies. Blunt noses, small eyes and flattened ears. Voles are commonly confused with house mice due to their similar appearance. However, voles have longer fur and far shorter tails. They are also sometimes mistaken for moles or gophers due to the similar damage they cause to lawns and gardens. Voles can reproduce up to 12 times per year with an average of 3-7 pups per litter. This means that a female vole can give birth to more than 100 offspring per year!

Damage

Runways – voles form visible, 2 inch wide surface runways in grassy areas that connect to their burrow openings. These runways are caused by the voles eating grass blades and continually moving to and from their underground burrow. Runways are sometimes hidden so you may have to pull back overhanging ground cover to find them. The opening of a vole burrow is a 1-2 inch round hole found in turf, mulch or ground covers.

Plant and tree damage – yellow, wilted plants that lift easily from the soil due to root damage are another sign that you have voles in the garden. They will also nibble directly on garden vegetables (ie. pumpkins, cucumber, squash, etc.). In the winter voles will gnaw the bark of fruit trees or shrubs a couple of inches above the ground and a few inches below the ground. When a vole gnaws completely around the trunk or roots (girdling) it and can cause the tree or shrub to die. Tree damage by voles can delay fruit production and cause uncharacteristic leaf colouration. Fruit trees in Saskatchewan that appear to be the most susceptible to vole damage are mostly non-native species such as apples, pears and plums.

Diet

Primarily plants (ie. roots, grasses, bulbs, stems, leaves, bark, fruit and nuts). Voles consume their weight in food daily. The best bait to use in a vole trap is vegetable material (ie. bark, root crops, cruciferous vegetables, pumpkin, squash, etc).

Preventative Techniques

Intervene in the places where voles breed. Keep grass cut, minimize mulch and eliminate dense vegetative cover as this provides food and protection for voles. You can also support their natural predators (ie. shrews and weasels). This means not using poison as it may cause secondary poisoning for these predators. You can also protect young trees and shrubs with a 12 inch hardware cloth fence (bury 3 inches into ground as well). Repellents (ie. Skoot and Bobbex) and packing snow around your fruit trees also helps keep voles away. For vegetable gardens, setting up traps, hilling root vegetables or using hardware cloth fences offers some protection.



Field Vole (*Microtus agrestis*)



Rodent feeding hole in a pumpkin.



Underground tunnelling.



Tree bark damage.