

prairie vole *Microtus ochrogaster*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Mammalia

Order: Rodentia

Family: Cricetidae

ILLINOIS STATUS common, native

FEATURES

The tan and dark hairs on a prairie vole's back give it a salt-and-pepper appearance. The belly fur is golden, yellow or red. The upper side of the tail is about the same color as the back while the lower side of the tail is lighter than the belly.

BEHAVIORS

The prairie vole may be found statewide in Illinois. It lives in grassy fields such as ungrazed pastures, alfalfa fields, roadsides and prairies. This mammal eats seeds, roots, mosses, alfalfa, blue grasses, clovers, dandelions and goldenrods. It is active during the night and day using a system of runways to get from one burrow to another. This vole uses several aggressive behaviors against other voles, among them "boxing," chasing, lunging, standing upright, threatening and wrestling. Mating may occur year round although it is more frequent in spring and fall. Litter size is normally three to five. The large nest is built under ground in a part of the burrow system. Young are helpless at birth but develop rapidly and are able to live on their own at about two and one-half weeks of age. Life expectancy of this vole is about one to two months.

HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

black soil prairie; dolomite prairie; edge; gravel prairie; hill prairie; sand prairie; shrub prairie

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