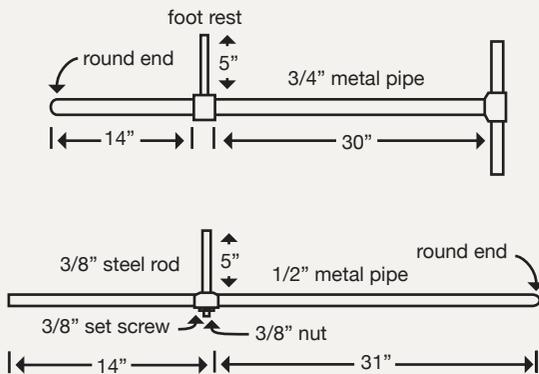


Probing for burrows

Successful trapping depends on accurately locating the pocket gopher's main burrow. To locate the burrow, you need to use a probe. Probes are commercially available or can be constructed from a pipe and metal rod. An enlarged tip that is wider than the shaft of the probe is an important design feature that increases the ease of locating burrows.

Locate areas of recent activity where fresh mounds with dark, moist soil exists. Fresh mounds that are visible above ground are the plugged openings of lateral tunnels.



The main burrow can be found by probing about 25 centimetres (10 inches) from the plug side of the mound (i.e. to the right of the mound). It is usually located 15 to 30 centimetres (six to 12 inches) deep. When the probe penetrates the burrow, there will be a sudden, noticeable drop of about five centimetres (two inches). You may have to probe repeatedly to locate the main burrow.

Further Information

Transportation and Agriculture Services
780-417-7100
www.strathcona.ca/pests

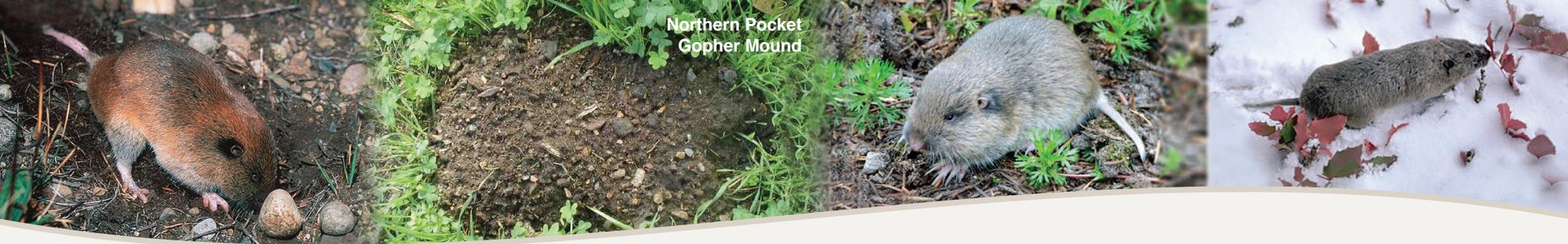
Office hours:
Monday to Friday
8:30 am to 4:30 pm
Closed from 12 noon to 1 pm
and on statutory holidays



Northern Pocket Gophers

Living with wildlife
in Strathcona County





Appearance

Alberta's only species of pocket gopher - the northern pocket gopher - varies in size from 15-25 centimetres (six to ten inches) and can weigh from 94 to 104 grams. Their fur is fine and soft, usually steel gray in colour on their back and slightly lighter on their belly.

Pocket gophers are generally confused with moles. Insect-eating moles are not present in Alberta.

Pocket gophers are vegetation consuming burrowing rodents that get their name from the fur-lined external cheek pouches, or pockets, that they use for carrying food and nesting materials.

They are built for digging and tunneling with powerful shoulders, large-clawed front paws, fine short fur that does not cake in wet soil. Their small eyes, small external ears and highly-sensitive facial whiskers help them move in the dark.

An unusual feature is that the pocket gopher's lips can close behind the four large incisor teeth to keep dirt out of its mouth when the pocket gopher uses its teeth for digging.

Behaviour

Pocket gophers live in a burrow system that can cover an area of 18 to 185 square metres (200 to 2,000 square feet). The burrows are about seven centimetres (three inches) below ground, whereas the nest and food storage chamber may be as deep as two metres (six feet). They seal the openings to the burrow system with earthen plugs. Short, sloping lateral tunnels connect the main burrow system and are created to push the dirt to the surface when they are building the main tunnel.

Although pocket gophers are sometimes seen feeding on vegetation at the edge of an open burrow, pushing dirt out of a burrow, or moving to a new area, they typically remain underground in the burrow system.

Mounds of fresh soil are the best sign of pocket gophers presence. Mounds are formed as the pocket gopher digs its tunnel and pushed the loose dirt to the surface. Typically, mounds are kidney-shaped when viewed from above. The hole, which is off to one side of the mound, is usually plugged.



One pocket gopher may create several mounds in a day. In non-irrigated areas, mound building is most pronounced during spring and fall when the soil is moist and easy to dig. In irrigated areas such as lawns, flower beds and gardens, digging conditions are usually optimal year round and mounds can appear at any time. In snowy regions, pocket gophers create burrows in the snow, resulting in long, earthen cores on the surface when the snow melts.

Pocket gophers do not hibernate and are active year round. They usually live alone within their burrow system, except for females with young or when breeding, and may occur in densities of up to 20 per acre.

Management

Pocket gophers are controlled by several natural predators from the weasel family, canid family, owls and hawk.

In certain situations, other means of control may be needed. To successfully control pocket gophers, the sooner you detect their presence and take control measures, the better. One of the best control measures for pocket gophers is trapping. Do not obtain "mole" traps as they do not work for this species.

Trapping

Trapping is a safe and effective method to control pocket gophers. Several types and brands of pocket gopher traps are available.



To set traps:

- Locate the main tunnel with a probe
- Use a shovel or garden trowel to open the tunnel wide enough to set a trap
- set the box as per the directions
- Prevent light from entering the burrow by covering the opening with soil, sod or cardboard. Fine soil can be sifted around the edges to ensure a light-tight seal. If too much light enters, the pocket gopher may plug the burrow with soil, filling the traps and making them ineffective. Leave the air hole open at the back of the trap
- Check traps often and reset them when necessary. If a pocket gopher is not caught within three days, reset the traps in a different location