

Meadow vole



A vole is a small rodent resembling a mouse but with a stouter body, a shorter hairy tail, a slightly rounder head, and smaller ears and eyes. There are approximately 70 species of voles; they are sometimes known as *meadow mice* or *field mice* in North America.

Most vole species have rootless molars that fold into a series of triangles. Voles are one of the few rodents whose molars continue to grow during their entire life. Adult voles, depending on the species, are three to seven inches long with the length of the tail. Females tend to be larger.

Diet: Depending on the species, the vole's diet consists of seeds, tubers, conifer needles, bark, various green vegetation such as grass and clover, and insects. Some species will die, however, if deprived from their main meal, Douglas Fir Needles, for too long.

Age: The average life of a vole is 3–6 months. Voles rarely live longer than 12 months. The longest lifespan of a vole ever recorded was 18 months.

Genetics and sexual behavior: The prairie vole is a notable animal model for sexual fidelity, since the male is usually faithful to the female, and shares in the raising of pups. (The woodland vole is also usually monogamous.) Another species from the same genus, the meadow vole, has promiscuously mating males, and scientists have changed adult male meadow voles' behavior to resemble that of prairie voles in experiments in which a single gene was introduced into the brain via a virus.

Voles exhibit complex genetic structures with much variation, and appear to be evolving rapidly when compared with other vertebrates. For this reason, they can be useful to archaeologists for dating strata, in a method referred to as the "vole clock."

Voles have a number of unusual chromosomal traits. Species have been found with anywhere from 17-64 chromosomes and in some species males and females have different chromosome numbers. Female voles have been found with chromosomes from both sexes, and in one species the sex chromosomes contain 20% of the genome. All of these variations result in very little physical aberration: most vole species are virtually indistinguishable.