

Celebrating Ohio Wildlife: Prairie Vole

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The time has come for another trek into the wonderful world of the wildlife of Ohio. So far, we have learned about a vast array of wildlife that call Ohio home but there are many more for us to learn about. In the last installment, we went to the birds and covered the ruby-throated hummingbird. For this column, we will come back to ground level for our feature animal, which is the prairie vole. Where does this animal live? What do they eat? Who are their predators? Let us answer all of those questions and more as we learn about the prairie vole.

The prairie vole is closely related to the mouse and rat as members of the rodent family. It is a short and stocky rodent with a small body, short tail, and short legs. Fur on this animal is a combination of a gray-brown with some black mixed in. According to Northern State University (NSU), the sides of the vole's body are lighter in appearance with a yellow to grayish white stomach and that their fur color is the same in either the winter or summer. On average, this animal will range in size from 5-6.75 inches and come in at a weight of around 2 ounces, according to NSU.

In Ohio, prairie voles are found in many locations. According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), this species is quite common in prairies, fencerows, along with old cemeteries. In these areas, it is common for them to construct burrows below ground along with runways above ground, per ODNR. These burrows are used for several purposes such as homes, predator protection according to NSU. Common items of the prairie vole's diet include grasses, flowering plants, roots, seeds, fruit, and tree bark. NSU writes that this species of vole obtain their food by gnawing and biting at the roots and stems of the plant and store this food in their underground burrows. It is early in the winter and late in the spring that the prairie vole will strip the bark off young trees and ornamentals.

The male and female prairie vole will share their underground burrow, often lined with grass. ODNR writes that the average size for a litter of voles is in the range of three to four that are commonly born between May and October, but that they will still breed well throughout the remainder of the year. Once the young prairie voles are born, both the mother and the father will take care of their young. The young are born hairless, but the fur will come back in following a time span of about three weeks at which time they will also experience rapid growth as well, according to Northern State University. Their eyes will open in about eight days following birth.

The catch comes with the fact that prairie voles face a high chance of mortality from a variety of different reasons. NSU writes that it is not uncommon for this species to experience mortality due to parasites, predators, humans, along with times of limited vegetation growth. Predators include animals such as coyotes, hawks, snakes, foxes, along with domesticated animals.

The question that appears on the mind of many is how to manage voles and the burrows that they can make in our yards. Many folks see the vole as an unwelcome pest to their lawn, garden, and farm fields. Some methods that have been developed can be used to help manage the prairie vole. Northern State University writes that electric repeller devices have been developed to fend off the voles. Some homeowners also use decoys of some of the prairie vole's natural predators such as the snake, hawk, or owl to further scare this animal as well.

Have you seen a prairie vole before? Keep an eye out for this animal as well as many of the other amazing species that call our great state of Ohio home. Be sure to stay tuned for further additions to our Ohio Wildlife series as there is many natural wonders to explore about Paulding County and Ohio. It is amazing out there, be sure to get out and explore the outdoors!