



Pocket gopher tunnel



Black-tailed prairie dog holes



Meadow vole in lawn



Mole hills

# WHAT'S DIGGING IN MY YARD?

By Rex Lockman

Wyoming has a variety of ground mammals that can be nuisances. To control the problem, one must correctly identify the critter. Can you identify these creatures or their signs?

## Pocket gopher

Pocket gophers are common throughout Wyoming. They leave mounds or aboveground tunnels but usually no apparent holes. Seeing a pocket gopher is rare as they are nocturnal and spend most of their time underground. This is most often the critter causing an underground nuisance in the lawn, flower bed, or eating the roots of a tree or shrub.

## Ground squirrels

There are four species of ground squirrels in Wyoming. Some have stripes; others are a tan color. These are the critters seen running all over in the springtime. They go into hibernation in early fall. Other than seeing the animal, all you will see is a small hole in the ground or a small mound of dirt by a hole. They are smaller than a prairie dog.

## Prairie dogs

There are two species of prairie dog in Wyoming: the white-tailed and the black-tailed. The white-tailed is usually to the west of the Laramie and Bighorn mountain ranges. The black-tailed is most prevalent on the eastern side of

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the state with a few other areas in the central and north-central portions. Black-tailed colonies are usually in groups or towns, and the white-tailed tend to be spread out. Both have large mounds with obvious holes bigger than a ground squirrel hole. They clip short the vegetation around their holes to better spot predators. They hibernate but will emerge on warm days in mid-winter.

## Voles

Wyoming is home to seven species of voles. Voles are smaller than squirrels and pocket gophers but a little bigger than a mouse. Voles will leave trails through the grass leading to little holes in the ground. Most species like wetter habitats along streams.

## Moles

Wyoming only has one species of mole, which resides in the southeastern part of the state. Moles are insectivores so they rarely eat plants. If a plant is killed, it is because the root of the plant got in the way of tunneling. Molehills or mounds are usually just a little bit of dirt mounded up with no apparent hole. The mounds are small – 4 to 5 inches in diameter compared to a pocket gopher mound that is at least 5 inches in diameter.



### To learn more

More information about these critters is at [barnyardsandbackyards.com](http://barnyardsandbackyards.com). Go to 'Magazine,' then to '2006 Archives'. See the "I've got gophers!" article.