



Klamath Network Featured Creature

May 2013

North American Water Vole

(*Microtus richardsoni*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The North American water vole (hereafter water vole), *Microtus richardsoni*, also called the Richardson's vole, belongs to the Order Rodentia, Family Muridae. Not to be confused with the European "Old World Water Vole" of the genus *Arvicola*, *Microtus richardsoni* is a North American species. *Microtus richardsoni* is known to be the largest of the North American Voles. It is, on average, 25 centimeters (10 inches) long, with an 8 centimeter (3 inch) tail. Generally, males grow to be larger than females. Males may weigh anywhere from 72-150 grams, while females weigh from 68-140 grams. The coat of the Water Vole contains gray-brown or red-brown fur with gray underparts.



Microtus richardsoni.

Photo Credit: <http://dallvaolliver.blogspot.com>

Where to See It in the Klamath Parks:

The water vole occurs in the northwestern United States and southern parts of western Canada. This Northwest Water Vole may be found at Crater Lake National Park scurrying in meadows or near the water's edge of streams.

Habitat:

The North American water vole habitat consists of alpine and sub-alpine meadows, usually at elevations between 900 m and 3,200 m. They create underground tunnels and nests, and are active year-round. Water voles are always found in proximity to water, most often near glacial or spring-fed streams, or wherever water is present throughout the year. Nests are only found above ground after snowmelt.



Distribution of *Microtus richardsoni*.

Source: North American Animals. Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

Distribution:

While the Water Vole is broadly distributed in the highlands of the northwestern United States and southwestern Canada, its habitat preferences are quite specific. Interestingly, water voles are not known to cross low elevation valleys or expanses of dense forest to move from one habitat to another. They are closely tied to montane wetlands and riparian environments within their range.

Diet:

The water vole is an omnivore, feeding on both vegetation, as well as small invertebrates. They do not store food like other small mammals, but rather consume dry portions of herbaceous vegetation. Water voles graze on grasses, leaves, root buds, rhizomes and corms in the winter, while they enjoy feeding on seeds and bulbs in the summer.

Cool Fact:

True to their name, water voles love to swim and dive. According to one study, captive young Water Voles swam voluntarily when they were only 17 days old, before they were even weaned! Additionally, the water vole is known to be the fastest swimming land rodent. Their large hind feet make them excellent swimmers.

For More Information:

DeKay, J.E., 1842. *Natural History of New York. Part I: Zoology*, p. 91. Thurlow Weed, Albany, New York, 146 pp.

Ludwig, Daniel R. "Mammalian Species: *Microtus richardsoni*." *The American Society of Mammalogists*. Nov. 223. (1984): 1-6. Science. Web. 13 May 2013. <<http://www.science.smith.edu/msi/pdf/i0076-3519-223-01-0001.pdf>>.

Wilson, Don E. and Ruff, Sue. "*Microtus richardsoni*." *North American Mammals*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999. 13 May 2013. <http://www.mnh.si.edu>