

Field Vole

Microtus agrestis Order: Rodentia

Typical blunt-nosed chubby vole shape with small rounded ears. The rather shaggy coat is yellowish grey and paler underneath. The tail is about $\frac{1}{3}$ rd the length of the body and is the same pale brown all over. Field voles tend to be a little larger than bank voles, at up to 50g weight and a body length of up to 12cm. Field voles create characteristic runs through grassland under cover. At feeding sites they may leave small heaps of nibbled grass stems 2-3 cm long cut at 45° often with small piles of 6-7mm long cylindrical green odourless droppings.

The bank vole has a neater red/brown coat and the tail is longer, about $\frac{1}{2}$ as long as the body. The bank vole's tail is also darker above and paler below whereas that of the field vole is uniformly pale grey/brown.



Breeding occurs from April to September and after a gestation period of about 21 days a litter of 3-7 young are produced, these are weaned after about 4 weeks. Voles may produce up to 7 litters each year and may live up to 2 years. Populations may rise rapidly during spring and dip in mid summer, possibly reflecting increased predation, before rising again in autumn. Densities of up to 100/hectare can occur at the spring peak. Field voles occur in un-grazed grassy fields, open woodland, verges, dunes and heaths where sufficient cover is available. A territory of up to 1000 M² is defended by a dominant male. The animals create a network of shallow burrows connected by covered runs. The spherical nest is built from shredded grass in tunnels or at the base of tussocks and has one or more entrances.

Grasses and herbaceous plants and occasionally insects. Food is sometimes stored in burrows. Unlike bank voles, field voles rarely climb or enter houses.

Field voles are one of Britain's commonest mammals and constitute an important food source for many carnivores. Owls, kestrels, stoats, weasels, snakes and foxes all rely on field voles for an important part of their diets. Domestic cats kill large numbers each year. Field vole numbers are thought to be declining as a result of changes in farming practices over the last 100 years. Increases in rabbit populations are also thought to be detrimental to field vole habitat by reducing grass cover. Voles may be controlled in forestry plantations where they can cause significant damage to young saplings by eating bark at ground level.

