



# NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

## Vertebrate Pests of the Garden and Landscape (August 19, 2023)

By Beau Keen, Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardener

Insects, unfortunately, are not the only thing that can cause complete consumption of whole plants. Some of those adorable "woodland creatures" we love from our favorite cartoons are also hungry vertebrate pests that consider your landscape part of their diet. Ground squirrels, gophers, voles, moles, and rabbits each have different types of holes they make in the ground, feeding preferences, and methods of managing them.

### California Ground Squirrels (*Otospermophilus beecheyi* & *Otospermophilus douglasii*):

- **Holes** – Usually greater than fist-sized, maintained open, multiple, often in colonies. The squirrel retreats inside when frightened instead of into a tree as a "tree squirrel" would.
- **Damage / Feeding Habit** – Eats seedlings, nuts, stone fruit, and citrus; may even girdle or eat the bark off the base of trees; burrows can destabilize structures and be a hazard to livestock and humans.
- **Effective Controls** – Remove dense vegetation; traps (illegal to move wildlife in CA, so the trap has to kill them or you have to later); professional fumigation; toxic baits (also poisonous to dogs, cats, and other domestic animals); shooting, deterrents, and biological controls are helpful but only for prevention, and less so for large infestations.
- **More Information** – <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7438.html>



### Pocket Gophers (*Thomomys* species):

- **Holes** – Crescent mounds of soil around a closed hole, multiple holes (See also moles).
- **Damage / Feeding Habit** – plant roots (they can even pull the plant partially underground to eat it); will feed on aboveground vegetation, but only a short distance away from their holes; chews holes in drip irrigation, causing flooded areas.
- **Effective Control** – exclusion by underground wire or pots; baits, traps, and beneficial predators
- **More Information** – <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7433.html>

### Voles (*Microtus californicus*):

- **Holes** – small open multiple holes connected by small well-traveled pathways, may be covered with grass
- **Damage / Feeding Habit** – feeds on grasses and herbaceous plants; gnawing/girdling of trees; look for patches of small gnaw marks within the first foot of the trunk
- **Effective Control** – remove heavy vegetation, exclusion by fencing or tree collars; trapping; baiting
- **More Information** – <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7439.html>



### Moles (*Scapanus* species):

- **Holes** – Closed and round holes; less common in dry areas or Central Valley unless there is soil moisture.
- **Damage / Feeding Habit** – eats mostly insects and occasionally bulbs, exclusively feeds underground; surface burrows dislodge plant roots and disturb lawns
- **Effective Control** – Traps, baits; exclusion with wire mesh, repellants rarely effective
- **More Information** – <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74115.html>

### Rabbits (*Lepus californicus*, *Sylvilagus audubonii*, & *S. bachmani*):

- **Holes** – Large open holes, often near covers like rocks or brush; look for round droppings nearby.
- **Damage / Feeding Habit** – vegetables, trees, berries, herbs, and ornamentals; front teeth make a 45-degree cut on flower heads and saplings less than 2 feet high
- **Effective Control** – exclusion with fencing or guards, kill-traps, and repellants
- **More Information** – <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7447.html>



Many vertebrate pests can be managed very well without the use of toxic baits if noticed early. Please consider that in addition to baits potentially poisoning pets, beneficial predators may also be poisoned by consuming or catching a poisoned garden pest. Usually, the best approach is one that uses multiple approaches and uses baits as a last resort.

Let us help you if you do not know what is causing you trouble.

**Are you interested in becoming a Master Gardener?** The UC Master Gardener Program of Tulare/Kings Counties is recruiting! Our next class runs from January 26 through May 24, 2024. We will be holding a mandatory orientation on Fri., October 13 @ 1 pm. Please register online: [https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC\\_Master\\_Gardeners/](https://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/) -- select "Become a Master Gardener." Please call our office with any questions at **(559) 684-3300**

**The Tulare-Kings Counties Master Gardeners will answer your questions in person:**

Visalia Farmer's Market – canceled until September 9 due to the market moving to a new location.

Hanford Farmer's Market – 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday, May-Sept, 5:30 – 9:00 pm, 219 W. Lacey, Hanford

**Questions? Call the Master Gardeners:**

Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30–11:30 am

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