

Columbian Ground Squirrel

(Urocitellus columbianus)



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Columbian ground squirrels live in colonies.

Explore Idaho
with Scout the Fox!

Scout



How to Identify:

- The Columbian Ground Squirrel is the largest ground squirrel species and stands around 12".
- Red/orange face and belly and tan (sometimes spotted) down their back
- Tail is short, bushy gray/red that lays flat when running
- Ears are short, don't stick out above the top of their head like tree squirrels.

Habitat:

- Their home range is Idaho, Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, and Montana
- They hibernate in their burrows for 8 months of the year, look for them in the late spring and early summer months!
- They dig burrows in meadows, forests, and sagebrush hills
- You can usually see them sticking their heads out of grass or standing up in other vegetation

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Fun Facts!

- Ground squirrels are only active for 4 months of the year! Of all the small mammals around the state ground squirrels hibernate the longest – around 8 months long. Marmots, ground squirrels, and chipmunks are all hibernators which means they sleep through some portion of the winter. Voles and mice do not hibernate, and they stay active through the winter months
- Males are first to come out of hibernation. They emerge in April to find mates. Females give birth between May and June. The offspring, usually a litter of 3-5 pups, will be independent from their mother within 1 month
- These Squirrels eat grass, leaves, bulbs, flowers and seeds. Usually they eat as they forage but they occasionally they cache their food to share with their offspring or to save for a day with bad weather
- Their relative, the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel, is a threatened species that only lives in two counties in Idaho.

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Help Protect the Ground Squirrel

- Columbian ground squirrels have healthy populations around Idaho, but other ground squirrel species are negatively impacted by accidental harvest and poisons that are leached into the environment.
- Grow native plants at your home to create habitat and food for wildlife! Maintaining ecological diversity by having plants adapted to this area benefits the whole ecosystem and everything in the food chain.
- Make sure to keep your pets on leashes while you visit the parks!

VOCABULARY

- **Monomorphism:** both males and females share the same appearance
- **Cache:** a spot to store and hide food from others
- **Herbivore:** plant-eater
- **Carnivore:** meat-eater
- **Omnivore:** diet consists of both plants and meat

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ACTIVITY TIME

Learn the differences between ground squirrels and tree squirrels. Match each characteristic to the proper squirrel by drawing a line.

- Short ears
- Pointy ears
- Short, flat tail
- Long, bushy tail
- Bright red belly and spotted tan back
- Dark brown back and light-colored belly
- Usually seen standing in a burrow or on top of a rock
- Usually seen climbing/sitting in a tree



GROUND SQUIRREL



TREE SQUIRREL

Usually seen climbing/sitting in a tree	Usually seen standing in a burrow
Dark brown to red back, light-colored belly	Red/orange belly, spotted tan back
Long, bushy tail, sticks up	Short bushy tail, gray/red in color, flat to ground
Pointy ears	Short ears that don't stick out above their head
Tree Squirrel (Red/Pine Squirrels)	Columbian Ground Squirrel

Answer Key