

Vole, Mouse — Kriisaq (N), Uгна'аq (S)

KAUGYA'AT UGNA'ANEK NERTAARTUT. – FOXES EAT VOLES.



Photo: Vole. Photograph by Tim Gillier, courtesy of iNaturalist.

The northern vole (*Microtus oeconomus*), also known as the tundra vole or root vole, is one of Kodiak's original residents. This small rodent feeds primarily on the bark and roots of plants, particularly sedges and cotton grass. In search of food, it will dig long underground tunnels. Biologists believe that the vole may have been the first mammal to colonize Kodiak after the last ice age. Because voles are the major prey of small carnivores like the red fox and short-tailed weasel, they speculate that the vole population must have been well established before other terrestrial mammals could thrive. It is also possible that voles arrived in the Kodiak Archipelago with people, inadvertently hitching rides with unsuspecting kayakers.

However they arrived, archaeological sites indicate that voles were common pests in ancient villages. Vole tunnels, vole skeletons, and garbage chewed by voles are regular finds. Moreover, traditional stories talk about the vole as a mischievous thief, rooting in people's stores and stealing food. Although voles were not eaten, people did occasionally collect the rice-like roots of the chocolate lily from vole caches. According to one legend, if a person takes lily bulbs from a vole, he should not take all of them and should leave fish or some other food in their place.