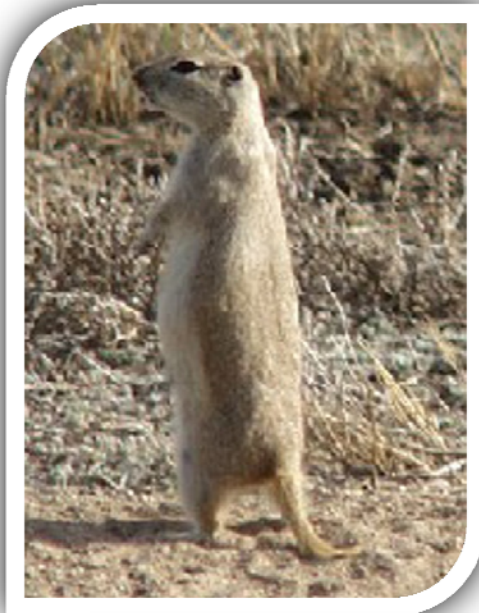


Piute ground squirrel (*Urocitellus mollis*)



Taxonomy:

Family Sciuridae. Formerly considered a subspecies of *Spermophilus townsendii*, and therefore often referred to as Townsend's ground squirrel. Two subspecies are recognized including the regional form *Urocitellus mollis mollis*.

Description:

Distinguished from other diurnal ground squirrels in the region by the pale brownish-gray color, absence of stripes, and inconspicuous tail and ear.
Total length: 201-233 mm; Tail: 44-61 mm; Hind foot: 33-39 mm; Weight (during mating period): 82-205 g.



Distribution:

Southeastern Oregon, southern Idaho, eastern California, western Utah, and most of Nevada. Locally common at low elevations west of the Wasatch Front.

Ecology and diet:

Piute ground squirrels occur in desert shrub habitat. During most of the year, they are dormant in underground burrows, in a combined period of hibernation and aestivation that includes both the coldest and hottest seasons. They emerge in the late winter to reproduce and to prepare for the long dormant period by laying up stores of body fat. They eat mainly green vegetation in the early spring, shifting to seeds as these become available, and occasionally eating insects and carrion.

Life History:

Males emerge from hibernation in late January or early February, and compete to mate with females which emerge later. A single litter of 6-14 young is produced annually following a gestation period of about 1 month. Young are weaned at about 1 month of age, and become sexually mature as yearlings. Adults may live for more than 5 years.

References: Rickart 1987, 1999