

FIELD GUIDE TO NORTH AMERICAN MAMMALS

Yellow-faced Pocket Gopher

(Cratogeomys castanops (Pappogeomys castanops))

ORDER: Rodentia
FAMILY: Geomyidae

The Yellow-faced Pocket Gopher feeds on starchy, tuberous roots of desert shrubs and on the roots and leaves of low-growing forbs. Like other pocket gophers, this species is considered an agricultural pest, doing extensive damage in orchards, gardens, potato patches, and other croplands. It digs long burrow systems, preferring deep sandy or silty soil. Burrow systems seem to contain only one nesting chamber, and except when breeding or raising young, these animals live alone. Yellow-faced Pocket Gophers live from less than one year (males), to a little more than one year (females). Females may reproduce within the same season as their birth and can have up to three litters in a season. Litter size averages 2-3, and ranges from 1-5.

Sexual Dimorphism:
Males are larger than females.

Length:
Range: 220-315 mm

Weight:
Range: 385-410 g males; 225-290 g females



Cratogeomys castanops - yellowish variation, left; reddish variation, right
Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)



FIELD NOTES

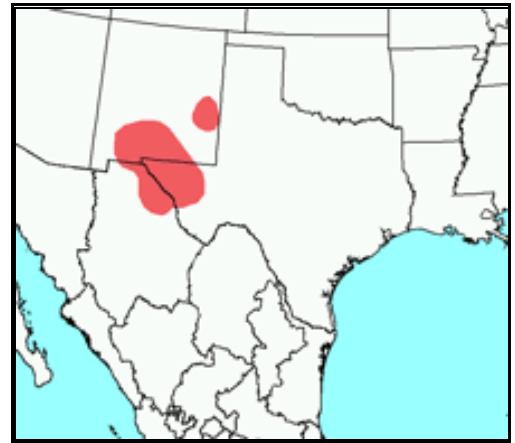
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**Desert Pocket Gopher**  
(*Geomys arenarius*)

ORDER: Rodentia  
FAMILY: Geomyidae

**Conservation Status:** Near Threatened.

The Desert Pocket Gopher is built for digging, with strong front legs and massive claws. Small eyes and ears are adaptations for traveling through tunnels. It uses its short tail as a guide if it has to back up. When it ventures aboveground, it stuffs large amounts of the vegetation it eats – including alfalfa, if it lives on cropland – into its external, fur-lined cheek pouches. After an expedition to the surface, the Desert Pocket Gopher plugs the opening to its burrow, which helps keep the climate inside comfortable and predators out. These Pocket Gophers can be very common in northern Mexico, western Texas, and south-central New Mexico where soil conditions are right. They are solitary and intolerant of others of their own species, and they exhibit a nasty disposition if handled by people.



**Also known as:**

Rio Grande Pocket Gopher, Tularosa Pocket Gopher, Sand Pocket Gopher

**Sexual Dimorphism:**

Males are larger than females.

**Length:**

Average: 254 mm  
Range: 218–302 mm

**Weight:**

Range: 165–254 g

**FIELD NOTES**

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**Plains Pocket Gopher**  
*(Geomys bursarius)*

ORDER: Rodentia  
FAMILY: Geomyidae

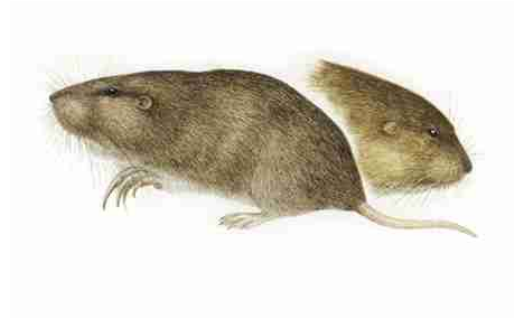
The Plains Pocket Gopher is a medium-size rodent with a disproportionately massive front end, including an impressive head and strong, curved claws. Its diet consists mostly of roots and tubers located by tunneling through loose soil. Like most pocket gophers, it tends to be nocturnal, and owls are among the main predators. Over their geographic range, populations tend to vary in coat coloration, from light brown to chocolate brown to black, and these variations correspond to soil color.

**Also known as:**  
Salamander, Tuza

**Sexual Dimorphism:**  
Males are larger than females.

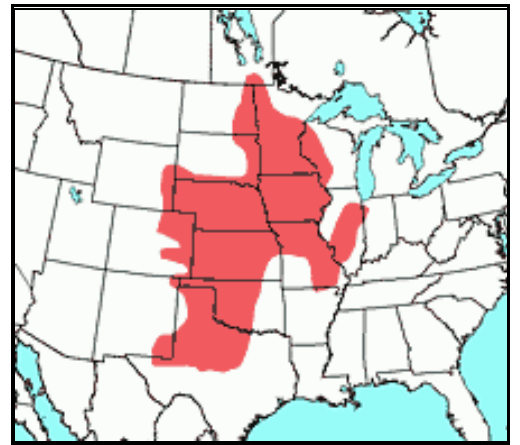
**Length:**  
Range: 225–325 mm

**Weight:**  
Range: 120–250 g



*Geomys bursarius* – left (*G. knoxjonesi* on right)

Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



**FIELD NOTES**

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**Jones's Pocket Gopher**  
*(Geomys knoxjonesi)*

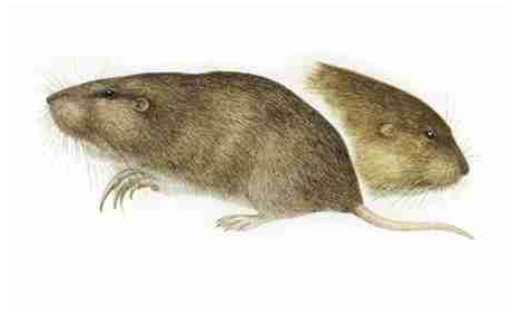
ORDER: Rodentia  
FAMILY: Geomyidae

Many rodents that are adapted to arid conditions—pocket mice, harvest mice, grasshopper mice, deer mice, kangaroo rats, and ground squirrels—occur in the same regions as Jones's Pocket Gopher in western Texas and eastern New Mexico, but only the pocket gophers (family Geomyidae) have a fossorial (that is, underground) lifestyle. Jones's Pocket Gophers are very difficult to distinguish from four other pocket gopher species without genetic and geographic data. At least this is true for scientists: presumably the pocket gopher can easily recognize another of its own species. They breed in the fall, and they produce one litter, of 2–4 offspring, a year. The gestation period is probably only about 23 days, which suggests that the female may store sperm in her body for several months before the eggs are fertilized and embryos begin to develop, or that fertilization may occur but development is delayed. As with many other mammals, much remains to be learned about this species of pocket gopher.

**Sexual Dimorphism:**  
Males are larger than females.

**Length:**  
Average: 236 mm  
Range: 203–282 mm

**Weight:**  
Range: 160–185 g



*Geomys knoxjonesi* – right (*G. bursarius* on left)  
Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's *Mammals of North America*, © Princeton University Press (2002)



**FIELD NOTES**

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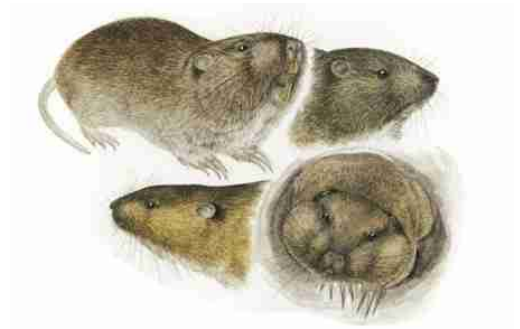
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**Botta's Pocket Gopher**

*(Thomomys bottae)*

ORDER: Rodentia  
FAMILY: Geomyidae

Pocket gophers dig with their front claws and with their teeth. A pocket gopher can close its mouth behind its front teeth, so it can dig without getting a mouthful of dirt. Its "pockets" are fur-lined, external cheek pouches, one on each side of its mouth, which it uses to transport food. Botta's Pocket Gopher has an extremely broad geographic range, and individuals vary widely in appearance: they can be nearly white, gray, brown, or blackish-brown. They vary in size, too. Males are larger than females. Males grow throughout their lives, whereas females stop growing after their first pregnancy, so older males can be much larger than females. Pocket gophers live in small, local populations, spending almost their entire lives underground in their network of burrows.



*Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)*

**Also known as:**  
Valley Pocket Gopher

**Sexual Dimorphism:**  
Males are larger than females.

**Length:**  
Range: 170–280 mm males; 150–240 mm females

**Weight:**  
Range: 110–250 g males; 80–160 g females



**FIELD NOTES**

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**Northern Pocket Gopher**  
*(Thomomys talpoides)*

ORDER: Rodentia  
 FAMILY: Geomyidae

**Conservation Status:** *Thomomys talpoides douglassi*, the Vancouver pocket gopher, is Vulnerable; *T. talpoides limosus*, Columbia River pocket gopher, and *T. talpoides segregatus*, Goat Mountain pocket gopher, are Near Threatened.

Of all North American pocket gophers, the Northern Pocket Gopher has the widest distribution, across most of the western United States and south-central Canada, and it occurs in the greatest variety of habitats. Only habitats with closed canopy and sparse groundcover are avoided. Northern Pocket Gophers are prodigious diggers, using both their front feet and their ever-growing incisors. Their burrow systems are elaborate, and depending on where they are, can be beneficial, aerating the soil, or a real problem for farmers.

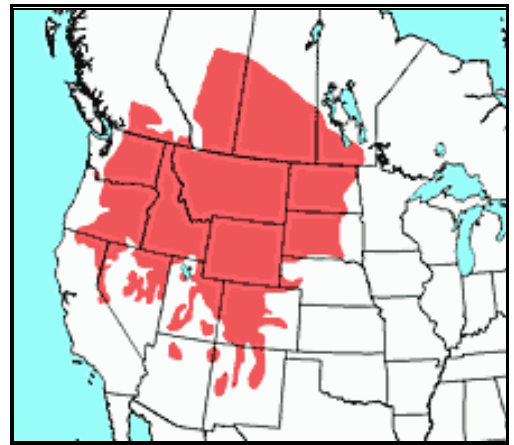
**Sexual Dimorphism:**  
 Males are larger than females.

**Length:**  
 Range: 165–260 mm

**Weight:**  
 Range: 60–160 g



*Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)*



**FIELD NOTES**

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**Southern Pocket Gopher**  
(*Thomomys umbrinus*)

ORDER: Rodentia  
FAMILY: Geomyidae

**Conservation Status:** *Thomomys umbrinus emotus*, the Animas Mountains pocket gopher, is Near Threatened.

Because most Southern Pocket Gophers live at high elevations in the mountains of Mexico, they are less accessible, and have been less-studied, than some other species. Like all pocket gophers, they are vegetarians, consuming both aboveground and underground parts of plants. Southern Pocket Gophers are active all year long and appear to have no set pattern of daily activity, excavating tunnels at any hour of the day. The average life span is probably 2–3 years. Most young are probably picked off by predators, which include hawks, owls, snakes, weasels, badgers, bobcats, and coyotes, before they are old enough to reproduce.

**Sexual Dimorphism:**  
Males are larger than females.

**Length:**  
Range: 210–250 mm males; 180–230 mm females

**Weight:**  
Range: 110–175 g males; 80–120 g females



*Credit: painting by Elizabeth McClelland from Kays and Wilson's Mammals of North America, © Princeton University Press (2002)*



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