

Botta's pocket gopher (*Thomomys bottae*)



Taxonomy:

Family Geomyidae. Also known as valley pocket gopher. More 195 subspecies have been named, including *Thomomys bottae albicaudatus* which is the local race in the Salt Lake Valley and surrounding areas.

Description:

Body robust with a short tail and short, strong limbs. Small eyes and ears, strong incisors, and large fur-lined external cheek pouches. Color grayish brown, fur soft and velvety.

Total length: 150-280 mm; Tail: 55-92 mm; Hind foot: 27-32 mm; Weight: 80-250 g.



Distribution:

Western US from southern Oregon to west Texas southward into northern Mexico, and the entire Baja peninsula. Common in valley bottoms and foothills along the Wasatch Front.

Ecology and diet:

Botta's pocket gophers are common in the valleys of the Wasatch Front, and in the surrounding foothills. They generally prefer loose, deep soils, and at higher elevations are replaced by the Northern pocket gopher which can tolerate rocky, shallow soils. Gophers use their large incisor teeth and powerful limbs to excavate elaborate burrow systems, typically leaving fan-shaped surface

mounds where excavated dirt is deposited. In the spring, snake-like tubes of dirt are seen where gophers have been active beneath the winter snow. They are non-social, and burrow systems are occupied by single animals or females with dependent young. Gophers eat a variety of bulbs, underground tubers, green plant material, and seeds. They are active day and night, but above ground only at night.

Life History:

Breeding occurs during the spring and summer. Females may have up to four litters of 4-5 offspring each litter per year. Gestation is about 19-21 days. Gophers are sexually mature as yearlings. Average lifespan is 2-3 years.

References: Jones & Baxter 2004.