

## Meadow vole

### *Microtus pennsylvanicus*

Meadow voles, otherwise known as field mice, play an important role in the Chicago River ecosystem. They reproduce in great numbers, which in turn feed birds-of-prey; a variety of snakes; and several mammals such as foxes, coyotes, and weasels. Large connected habitats like the upland prairie at Linne Woods and the savanna woodland at Miami Woods are essential to the survival of all the animals mentioned above, including the meadow vole.

Meadow voles are the most widespread vole in North America. As their name suggests, they prefer to live in meadows, fields, grassy marshes, and along rivers and lakes. Voles are good swimmers and diggers. They make extensive use of tunnels and burrow underground chambers where they sleep and keep food stores. Voles take refuge from predators in their system of burrows and grassy tunnels. During the cold winter months meadow voles will nest with other family members and consume large amounts of food to keep warm. They can eat up to 60% of their body weight each day, mainly grass, seeds, grains and berries.

Especially because they are so abundant in the habitats where they are found, meadow voles have crucial roles in the ecosystem. Many predators rely on voles to make up a significant portion of their diet, especially owls, hawks and falcons. Because of their importance as a food source, voles need protection – as does their habitat.

Voles consume large quantities of grass and recycle the nutrients held in the grass through their droppings. They also help to aerate the soil through their digging activities.

