



Ada County

Pest of the Month



April 2011

A quick guide to identifying and controlling invasive plants and animals found in the county

ROCK CHUCKS

The Rock Chuck (or Yellow Bellied Marmot) is the largest of the Ground Squirrels, weighing between 5 and 11 pounds when fully grown. They can live up to 15 years and can reproduce by age 2. Living in colonies of up to 20 animals, rock chucks cause severe damage to the landscape by digging huge holes in irrigation canal banks, pastures, and along side buildings.



Quick Facts

Rock Chucks have a single breeding season each year which begins in the spring. They have a gestation period of one month and typically have litters of 5 to 9 pups. A male will have a harem of females and are antagonistic towards other males. In some instances when burrows are located near agricultural or farming operations, the rock chuck can be a pest because it forages on crops. Burrows can also be a hazard for farm equipment and livestock. Rock chucks spend most of their lives in their burrows, where tunnel systems may reach 10 to 70 meters in length and can be over a meter down.

Rock Chucks are diurnal animals, meaning they are awake during the day and sleep at night. They also have two dormant periods: they aestivate in late summer and hibernate in the winter. Rock Chucks are omnivores, eating grass, leaves, flowers, fruit, grasshoppers, and bird eggs.

Habitat



Many times rock chucks choose to dig their burrows near the safety of a rock pile. They are often seen on top of these rocks sunning themselves in the summer heat.

The rock chuck lives in the western United States and south-western Canada, including the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevadas. They inhabit steppes, meadows, talus fields, and sometimes live on the edges of deciduous or coniferous forests. Typically they are found above 6,500 feet (2,000 m) of elevation.

Their territory is about 4 to 7 acres surrounding a number of burrows. It is believed Rock Chucks choose to dig burrows under or near rocks because predators are less likely to see their burrow.

See control methods on other side...

How to Control



Baiting

The most effective method in controlling rock chucks is generally done through baiting. Baiting with pesticides consists of applying the pesticide to an item of food that the rock chucks eat such as carrots, cabbage, or alfalfa. By applying a cooking oil to the food, the pesticide will adhere to the item and then can be placed into one or several of the tunnel entrances that the rock chucks use. This approach must be taken carefully as there are other non-target animals that may also eat the bait. As with all pesticide usage, wash hands carefully after use and always follow the label instructions of the pesticide you are using to assure compliance with State and Federal law.

Other less effective control methods include:

- Trapping:** Due to the dense population of rock chuck colonies, traps are generally not effective for total elimination.
- Fumigants:** (Gas Cartridges) This labor intensive method can be effective in areas where the soil is not too porous or rocky.
- Habitat Modification:** Reducing vegetative cover or rock habitat, may limit rock chuck populations. More than likely, only forcing them to nearby meadows or fields.

Natural Control

Natural predators like wolves, foxes, hawks, owls, and coyotes help to control the rock chuck population. When a predator is spotted, a rock chuck will whistle to warn other rock chucks in the area, giving it the nickname “whistle pig”.



Residents of Ada County living outside the city limits may call our office for assistance controlling this agricultural pest.



For questions or concerns, please contact :

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