



MOLES AND SHREWS

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Fisheries and Wildlife

MOLES

Several species of moles inhabit the United States, but only the common (or Eastern) mole and the star-nose mole are found in Minnesota. Moles are characterized by beak-like noses, tiny rudimentary eyes, no visible ears, paddle-like front feet with large claws, velvety fur, and stubby, hairless tails.

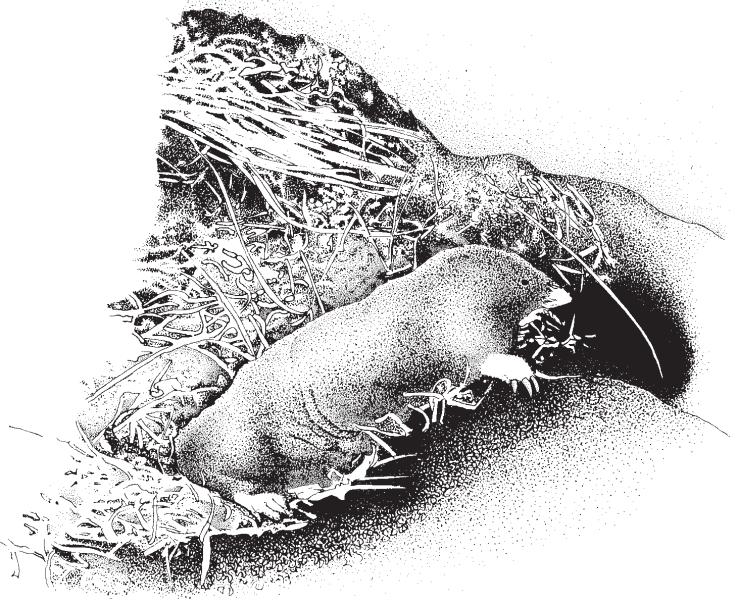


Figure 1a. Common (Eastern) mole

Typically a mole diet includes earthworms, beetles, grubs, and other insect larvae. Moles seldom feed extensively on plant material; however, several species of mice may inhabit mole burrows and damage bulbs and other plant roots.

Eastern moles commonly inhabit fields, meadows, and lawns throughout counties in the southeastern fourth of Minnesota. Their shallow tunneling raises irregular, snake-like pressure ridges on the surface. Unfortunately, this activity may kill plants and cause homeowners some concern.

Star-nose moles are found in wet areas of the northern forests. Their activity more closely resembles pocket gopher diggings because the pressure ridges are absent, but these moles do produce noticeable mounds of loose soil. Twenty-two small pink tentacles tip the nose of this mole and are used to detect the presence of worms and insect larvae.

Control

Trapping is probably the homeowner's most cost-effective method of control. Successful trapping requires time, patience, and knowledge of mole habits. The three most commonly used trap types are (a) scissor jaw, (b) harpoon, and (c) choker. These can be purchased from nurseries, hardware stores, or farm supply stores.



Figure 1b. Shrew

The best time to trap is in the early spring, when pressure ridges are first noticed, or after the first fall rains. At other times of the year, moles may retreat deep underground, making them difficult to capture.

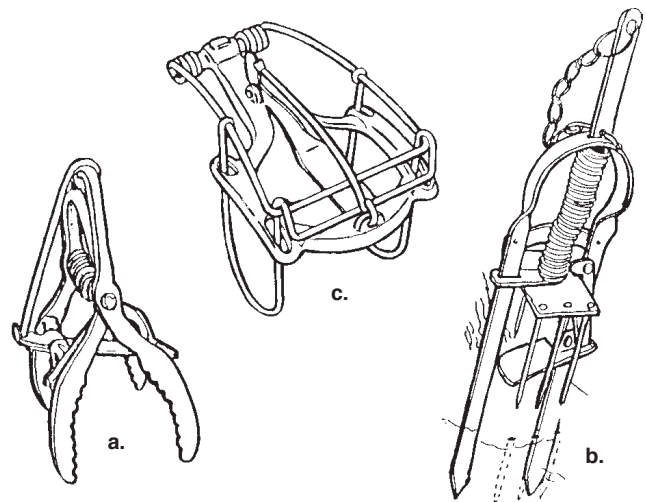


Figure 2. Mole traps: (a) scissor jaw, (b) harpoon, (c) choker loop

“Surface burrows,” identified by ridges of raised earth, usually indicate mole activity. However, not every such burrow will be in constant use. To find the active ones, stamp down a short section of each ridge. Observe daily for several days and restamp any raised sections. A ridge raised daily indicates an active path and a trap should be set there. Be certain to move any trap that fails to catch a mole within two days.

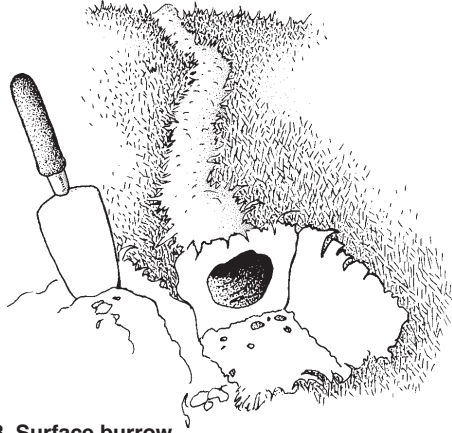


Figure 3. Surface burrow

Inspect traps after a rain. If the soil has washed away, leaving a space beneath a trap trigger, insert a chip of flat stone in this space to ensure quick trigger action or reset the trap.

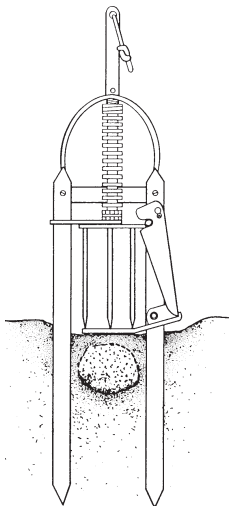


Figure 4. Harpoon trap set above burrow

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SHREWS

Six species of shrews are found in Minnesota. They range in size from the pygmy shrew, the smallest, to the shorttail shrew, which is four to five inches long and weighs up to 3/4 ounce. Most shrews are a rather drab gray or gray-brown. The masked shrew is prevalent across the northern United States and Canada and probably is the most common member of the shrew family.

Control

Shrews do occur in urban and suburban areas, particularly where the residential landscaping or surrounding natural vegetation supports high populations of the shrews' preferred foods. As predators, shrews tend to focus their activity in areas where prey is plentiful. Since they feed primarily on insects, snails, slugs, and mice (and devour enormous numbers of them), shrews should be protected. Occasionally shrews enter dwellings, but they seldom cause damage. The presence of shrews in large numbers may indicate that household pests such as mice or large insects are also present. Investigate thoroughly for signs of these pests.

Remove shrews by live trapping, using the smallest size traps (Havahart 0 or Tomahawk 101), or catch them with mouse traps. Appropriate baits for either type of trap include peanut butter, chocolate, small squares of bacon, Ham, or raw beef.

REFERENCE FOR ILLUSTRATIONS

Henderson, F. Robert. 1983. Moles. In *Prevention and Control of Wildlife Damage*, pp. D53-D61, ed. Robert M. Timm. Great Plains Agricultural Council Wildlife Resources Committee and Nebraska Cooperative Extension Service.

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