

## Small Native Mammals of Saskatchewan

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### THE GOPHER

To begin with, the well known little animal generally referred to as the gopher is not a true gopher but a member of a large clan of burrowing rodents rightly called the ground squirrels. This particular species is named Richardson's Ground Squirrel (*Citellus richardsonii*) but is popularly known as Prairie Gopher, Yellow Gopher or just Flickertail—the latter term refers to its habit of



Photo by W. Yanchinski

twitching its tail when excited or alarmed.

The ground squirrel is aptly named for this creature spends more than three-fourths of its life underground and much of this in a profound state of dormancy known as hibernation. The gophers in the colony I observed last summer were practically all underground before the end of August and most of them will not reappear before next April—a full seven months of the year. The curious feature about this phenomenon is why hibernation should start months before winter really begins to make itself felt or for that matter why hibernate at all: after all, other similar animals stay awake more or less throughout the whole bleak season. Tree squirrels sleep only fitfully during the winter, and much the same is true of mice, weasels, and others.

The answer in case of the ground squirrels is found in their food habits. Unlike some of the mice these squirrels cannot convert dry starchy foods into moisture and since a squirrel may never take a single drink in its whole life, it must depend entirely on the succulent green plants to provide the water for its body needs. These plants are plentiful in spring and early summer but as the season rolls on they become dry and woody and much less palatable. During the growing season the squirrel gorges himself on the green growth about him but as he gets fatter and the vegetation less tasty he is inclined to spend more and more time underground. The dry coarse food together with restricted quantity of oxygen in the underground burrow tends to induce the long sleep. Finally he quits eating altogether,

## Baby Rabbit

JUDY CRUICKSHANK, Lumsden

One day the rake went over a rabbit's nest. Hawks were waiting to grab the young ones, but Dad was able to save one baby. It drank milk from my doll's bottle, four of them a day, when Mom held it. When it was big enough to eat green stuff we let it go in the woods.



Rescued baby rabbit sucking  
doll's milk bottle.