

VOLES WERE BUSY IN TURF, THANKS TO HEAVY SNOWFALL

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As the snow cover melts, many turf managers in Minnesota are alarmed to find that meadow voles were busy in their lawns and turf areas over the winter.

Meadow voles, rodents with rather short tails, are common throughout Minnesota. Often mistakenly called “field mice” or “meadow mice,” meadow voles are usually found in areas with a heavy, protective cover of grass, grass-like plants or leaf litter.

Vole damage to turf may be especially noticeable this spring because of the heavy snow cover that persisted over the winter. Voles generally do not venture into open places, such as lawns, to avoid being exposed to predators. But when there’s good snow cover, voles may feed on lawns. As they feed, they create tunnels or runways 1 to 2 inches wide between the ground and the snow, leaving tell-tale depressions filled with grass clippings.

Although vole damage to turf can look terrible, it’s seldom serious. The crowns of grass plants are usually below the soil surface and the damage caused by vole feeding will be repaired when the grass resumes growth in the spring. After two or three mowings, the damage will probably not be noticeable.

However, vole feeding on trees and shrubs is often a more serious matter; woody plants can be badly disfigured or even killed if their stems are girdled, or stripped of bark all the way around.

What can be done to control voles? Some feed stores and garden centers sell poisons listed for their control. These poisons should be placed only where voles are likely to be. After the snow melts, voles aren’t likely to be on your turf, so DO NOT put poison on your turf. Instead, poison can be placed in areas with a good cover of tall grass, other plants or leaf litter. Follow directions on the labels carefully **to avoid poisoning pets and other wildlife.**

Snap mouse traps, baited with a peanut butter-oatmeal mixture or apple slices, can be used also to control low populations of voles. However, trapping is a pretty inefficient control, probably best used to protect only a few, high-value trees and shrubs.

Also, dropped bird seed serves as both an attractant and food source for voles during the winter.

Finally, to prevent damage to trees and shrubs, before the weather gets cold in the fall, surround their stems with a cylinder of quarter-inch hardware cloth sunk 6 inches into the ground. Remove the hardware cloth cylinders a couple of inches larger in diameter than the stems they are to protect.

Vole populations peak periodically — every two to five years, even though snakes, hawks, owls, foxes and weasels all prey on voles. Voles eat a variety of plants, mostly grasses and perennial plants. But they also eat bark, especially in fall and winter.

Adapted from article by Jim Kitts, Extension Specialist-Wildlife/Fisheries, Minnesota Extension Service.

Plants Enhance Landscape, Help Protect Environment

Trees, shrubs and turfgrass provide environmental, social and economic benefits. They enhance air and water quality, provide biodiversity and wildlife habitat and reduce soil erosion. Data point to improved health and safety and reduced crime as other benefits of urban landscaping.

All green plants remove carbon dioxide and certain impurities from the atmosphere and store carbon in their tissues and release oxygen as part of the photosynthetic process. In this way, they serve as natural air cleaners.

Trees provide shade and shelter from wind and improve golf course landscape aesthetics.

Turfgrass plants, through their great numbers, help cool surrounding areas through evapotranspiration. Turfgrasses, with their extensive, ground-level leaf and root systems, also entrap particulate pollution from the air and water. The microbes that grow in association with grasses convert these pollutants into energy for themselves and, ultimately, into harmless, soil-building by-products.

Local nurseries can provide the trees and shrubs to help enhance golf course settings. Local purchases will generally assure high-quality plant materials well adapted to thriving in the local environment. These same nurseries can provide the technical assistance necessary for proper placement and maintenance of these plants.

Our most beautiful community settings, including golf courses, owe their attractiveness not only to the architectural skills of the designers, but also to the plants that provide the functional and aesthetic enhancement that make them more amenable for human habitation.

Adapted from article by Ron Smith, Professor, North Dakota State University Extension Service.

New Turf/Water Quality Publications

— NOW AVAILABLE —

Six new publications are now available from the Minnesota Extension Service dealing with the issues of turf maintenance practices and their impact on water quality. Their titles are:

- AG-BU-5726-E**Turfgrass Management for Protecting Surface Water Quality
- AG-FO-5889-B**Using Lawn Fertilizers and Pesticides Responsibly
- AG-FO-5890-B** . .Lawn Care Practices to Reduce the Need for Fertilizers & Pesticides
- AG-FO-5891-B**Responsible Use of Lawn Care Pesticides
- AG-FO-5892-B**Phosphorous Management Practices for Lawns
- AG-FO-5893-B**Nitrogen Fertilizer Use for Lawns

The larger publication (AG-BU-5726-E) includes a more thorough discussion of the smaller publication topics, a section on turfgrass benefits and a listing of the various articles referenced in the publication. All of the publications can be helpful to inform and educate your golf course employees and members about the positive aspects of turfgrass and the environmentally responsible practices you use at your golf course.

All publications can be ordered from your local county extension offices or the University of Minnesota Extension Service Distribution Center, 3 Coffey Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108.