

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Voles

POST #10—December 2, 2021

December has arrived and Bogdiversity Thursday posts have returned! This Thursday, we will consider perhaps two of the most important small mammals in the entire region: Southern Red-backed Vole and Meadow Vole!

Southern Red-backed Voles are beautiful, as far as small brown mammals go! They have uniquely colored pelage, with a rufous band along their back. A boreal forest species, the Southern Red-backed Vole is typically most active during the day in the winter months and is primarily nocturnal during the summer. Southern Red-backed Voles are perhaps the #1 food source to the avian and mammalian predators found in the Sax-Zim Bog.

Meadow Voles are incredibly prolific and widespread. This species can breed any time of year and one female can produce up to 17 litters of 6-11 pups in one year! Meadow Voles are not as easy to see during the winter as Southern Red-backed Voles. Meadow Vole activity can best be seen after the snow thaws, as the lack of cover exposes the tunnels between layers of grass. These

expansive networks can be found along roadsides, in yards or parks, and any wild space with a thick layer of grass.

Both species occupy an interesting microhabitat during the winter season: the Subnivean Zone! If you can imagine a cross section of a snow bank, the Subnivean Zone is the layer between the ground and the bottom layer of snow. This zone has an interesting microclimate, as it maintains a near constant 32 degree F, keeping plants and mammals insulated during the coldest surface temperatures.

While most mammal watchers might not be as interested in small mammals as larger mammals, keep your eyes peeled for these two amazing species the next time you are in the Sax-Zim Bog! More information about these important rodents below.

(Photos below by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Southern Red-backed Vole is quite colorful for a small, brown rodent! If you are quiet near bird feeders in the Bog during the winter, sometimes you might get lucky and see these beautiful bog denizens.



Meadow Voles can be seen roaming around above the snow on warm winter days and are more likely to be seen in the Sax-Zim Bog during the winter than Southern Red-backed Voles. Meadow Voles lack the rufous tones of Southern Red-backed Vole along their backs.