

Nature Kids OUT AND ABOUT

BY CORA KAPLAN

Ground squirrels are a common sight in Alberta. Richardson's ground squirrels, also called gophers, are often considered pests because they live in colonies and dig many burrows to hibernate and stay safe underground – including under farmland. Ground squirrels play an important role in their food web. Did you know we have five species of ground squirrel in Alberta? Learn how to identify each species by matching up the photos to the descriptions below.



Fill in the blanks...
Which photo matches my description?

- 5** **Franklin's ground squirrel**
I have a grey head and tail. My tail is bushy, unlike other ground squirrels. I look speckled with a dark brown back and light-coloured belly.
- 4** **Golden-mantled ground squirrel**
I have stripes down my back that make me look like a chipmunk, but I don't have stripes on my face. My shoulders are red-brown and I have a light underside.
- 1** **Thirteen-lined ground squirrel**
I have stripes and spots down my dark back. My head and tail are dark, but I have a light underside from nose to tail.
- 3** **Columbian ground squirrel**
My red-brown belly and face distinguish me from other ground squirrels. My back and tail are dark and speckled.
- 2** **Richardson's ground squirrel**
I vary in colour from grey to yellow-brown, which is consistent from nose to tail. I am darker on my speckled back and lighter on my belly, with a short and skinny tail.



To see all 14 species of squirrels that live in Alberta, check out the Squirrels of Alberta ID Guide at naturealberta.ca/ground-squirrel