

Wildlife Checklist



At first glance, Craters of the Moon seems a lifeless place. The young lava flows and cinder cones are indeed inhospitable. During summer as little as one inch of rain may fall. This moisture drains quickly into the porous rock and out of reach of animals. Air temperatures soar into the 90s and the lava surface may reach 170°F. Drying winds of 15-30 miles per hour are common.

Despite these harsh conditions, many creatures eke out a living here. Animals escape the summer heat in different ways. Most, like the mountain lion, venture forth in search of food only at night. Others, like the pika, are active at dusk and dawn. Those that are out during the day often seek shelter in the hottest hours.

Marmots take more extreme measures to escape heat. They enter a state of suspended animation called estivation, during which their metabolism and body temperature drop. They remain inert until cooler, moister conditions return.

Since there are no streams and few water holes at Craters of the Moon, animals must get the moisture they need directly from their food. Mule deer munch bitterbrush leaves. Violet-green swallows snatch insects from the air. Rattlesnakes inject their venom and swallow squirrels whole. Each of these foods contains water essential to life.

The following list should assist you in identifying the animals you see during your visit. Even if you do not see animals, be alert to evidence of their presence: tracks, nests, feathers, bones, calls, and smells.

All animals have been classified as common or uncommon.

Category I: Quite common at some time during the year. May include resident, migrant, or breeding animals.

Category II: Has been observed within the monument only infrequently. Sightings of these animals should be reported at the visitor center.

Reptiles and Amphibians

- Gopher snake - I
- Rubber boa - I
- Western rattlesnake - II
- Western garter snake - II
- Western yellow-bellied racer - II

- Sagebrush lizard - II
- Short-horned lizard - II
- Boreal chorus frog - II
- Western skink - I
- Western toad - I

Mammals

- Dusky shrew - II
- Vagrant shrew - II
- Little brown bat - I
- Long-eared bat - II
- Small-footed myotis - II
- Hoary bat - II
- Townsend's big-eared bat - II
- Pika - I
- Pygmy rabbit - I
- Nuttall's cottontail - II
- Snowshoe hare - II
- White-tailed jackrabbit - I
- Black-tailed jackrabbit - II
- Least chipmunk - II
- Yellow-pine chipmunk - I
- Yellow-bellied marmot - I
- Columbian ground squirrel - II
- Golden-mantled ground squirrel - I
- Red squirrel - I
- Northern pocket gopher - II
- Great basin pocket mouse - I
- Beaver - II

- Western harvest mouse - II
- Deer mouse - I
- Bushy-tailed woodrat - I
- Montane vole - I
- Long-tailed vole - II
- Muskrat - II
- Western jumping mouse - II
- Porcupine - II
- Coyote - I
- Red fox - I
- Black bear - II
- Raccoon - II
- Long-tailed weasel - II
- Badger - I
- Striped skunk - II
- Mountain lion - II
- Bobcat - II
- Elk - II
- Mule Deer - I
- Pronghorn - I

