

## **Learning more about the micromammals of Parc national du Mont-Mégantic**

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Park visitors seldom notice micromammals, creatures that tend to be nocturnal by nature. Yet both their number and their ecological role are important. Indeed, in addition to contributing to the control of burrower insects and the dispersion of plant seeds, these small mammals also serve as prey for larger mammals and meat-eating birds. In fact, micromammals are a category of mammals that is made up of the smallest species, namely mice, shrews and moles.

Already in the 1990s, a few surveys had been carried out at Parc national du Mont-Mégantic, but all had focused on the same sector. During the summer of 2006, four sites were surveyed, this time, in different park environments.

The first site, located alongside a brook near the ASTROlab, is at the foot of the mountain and in the domain of the sugar maple – yellow birch forest. It is at this site that we observed the greatest number of different species, including the rock vole, a new species for the park and a rare species in Québec. This species is likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable. The second site, that of De La Montagne brook, is also located in the domain of the sugar maple – yellow birch forest, but in a sector where no human activity is found nearby. Six species were surveyed here, including the meadow vole and the meadow jumping mouse, even though this is a forest environment! It should be noted that this is the first mention of these two species in the park.

The third site, situated at the col, between Mont Mégantic and Mont Saint-Joseph, is located in a mixed forest at an altitude of 900 metres. Five species were surveyed here. Among them, the American water shrew is also considered a new species in the park. Finally, at the site atop Mont Mégantic in a fir stand at more than 1 000 m in altitude, we found a smaller number of specimens. Six different species live together on this territory including a concentration of masked shrew, well adapted to these conifer forests. The big winner of this survey is the redback vole, a very abundant species at all four sites.

In all, 15 species have now been confirmed at Parc national du Mont-Mégantic. Among them, three have a legal protection status, including the Gapsé shrew which was surveyed in 1995 and then again in 2006. This rare species is currently at the centre of a controversy. Specialists cannot agree on whether it is a separate species or whether it belongs to the same species as the long-tailed shrew, present in the mountains of New England. Whatever the case may be, the park's mountain environment is perfectly suited to this rare species, which takes full advantage of this protected territory.