

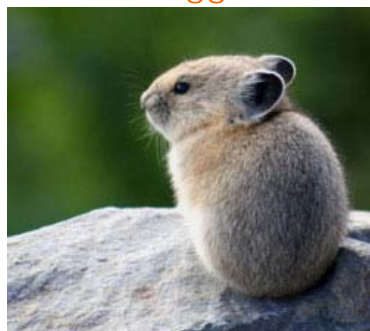


# newsletter

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Events!

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## Nature Nugget – The American Pika



This little nature nugget is one of Alta's most elusive characters. The American Pika (*Ochotona princeps*) can generally be found in Utah among rocky outcrops above 8000 feet. They primarily inhabit higher elevations and cooler temperatures due to their unique sensitivity to temperature. Pikas run the risk of death to exposures over 79.9 degrees fahrenheit. It is because of this special habitat requirement that the pika has peaked the interest of conservationists and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Fortunately, initial investigations have found that the pika is of no immediate risk of extinction from climate change or other increased environmental pressures. This is mostly due to the wide range they inhabit from central British Columbia and Alberta into the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico and the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California.

The pika is an herbivore and rodent by classification with two upper incisors to help cut vegetation. It is small in size, about 6-8 inches in length, and looks much like a mouse or squirrel, but it is more closely related to rabbits and hares (without the cottontail). They also have a unique call that compensates for their small stature, sounding like a loud high-pitched honk that can be heard across a mountainside.

The pika will come out of winter hiding when the snow melts in the spring and go back under the ground when the snow returns in the winter. Unlike, other mammals that stay within their high elevation homes throughout the winter, the pika does not hibernate. Instead it fattens up over the summer and stores food for the winter. In order to keep the stored food from going bad from mold, the pika piles vegetation on rocks to dry out in the sun before bringing it under ground with them for the winter. These piles are referred to as haystacks and can be as large as a bushel. These dried goods help the pika and their families survive the winter. In late spring, the pika will mate and about a month later will emerge for the summer to feed a litter of 2 to 4 young. If the summer season is long enough, pikas could have a second litter.

Besides high temperatures, pikas have a few other reasons to be concerned for their safety above the rocks including cougars, raptors, coyotes and ermines. With a life expectancy of 4 to 7 years old, these fast moving, loud chirping, little cute furry mammals have a busy life in the summer and a slow winter (to combat boredom they must spend their time playing poker and telling stories of near escapes from their arch enemy the ermine). So, the next time you find yourself in the higher elevations of Alta or the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache and near a field of rocks, listen for the funny honk of the pika, and look very closely for this special rabbit like creature.



Photo: Pika & Haystack By: Eric Jain

## Tip of the Month—Fall Composting



Summer is dwindling down, soon the leaves will be red and orange and on your lawn or drive way. Winds will be picking up, branches will be falling from the trees, and the garden will be fully harvested. If you haven't yet started composting, now is the perfect time to begin. Why throw your leaves in a bag to be taken to the dumpster? Why not

create a little compost for your raised beds or potted plants come spring? It doesn't take much money and most of your materials are falling from above.

All you need is small space to compost and a little time every other day to turn the goods. You can make a box, buy a container (especially for small areas), or just heap the goods on the ground. It is up to you on how elaborate you want to make the compost and how big it gets. If you have too much compost at the end of the winter, there are always friends' and family's gardens. For more information on how to get started visit either of these websites: [www.howtocompost.org](http://www.howtocompost.org) or [www.composting101.com](http://www.composting101.com).



## Sustainable Update

### SEEDS



### OF SUCCESS

This summer the Alta Environmental Center has joined forces with Seeds of Success (SOS), a national organization designed to identify, collect and store plant species across the country for research, restoration, and preservation of the species. Working with the local chapter from Red Butte Gardens, over 20 species in Alta have been identified for SOS collections.

Along with adding to the national seed bank, these seeds will be available to Red Butte Gardens and Alta Ski Area for restoration needs. When an area is identified for restoration efforts, SOS may be called upon to obtain safely stored, viable seed for free to grow and plant in the designated site.

Established in 2001, SOS has collected 8,163 different native seed species throughout the U.S. Alta Ski Area is very excited to be a part of this fantastic program, further supporting education, research, and sustainability. For more information on SOS visit [www.nps.gov/plants/sos](http://www.nps.gov/plants/sos).