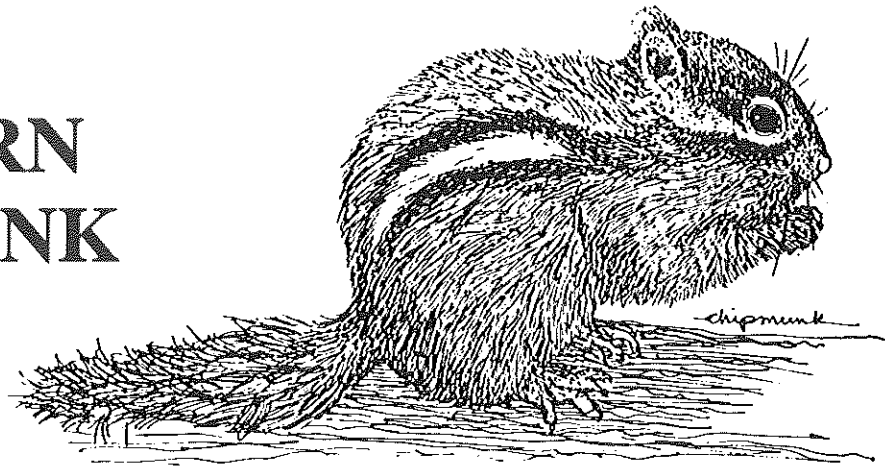


EASTERN CHIPMUNK



Since the beginning of time, a small creature with a distinctive dark stripe running down the length of its back could be found scurrying across the ground. Today, this common creature is known as the Eastern chipmunk, and, despite the number of years that have passed, is unusually similar to its ancestors with virtually no changes in its physical attributes.

DESCRIPTION

The Eastern chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) is a small, squirrel-like, ground-dwelling mammal, which belongs to the order Rodentia (rodents) and the family Sciuridae (squirrels). Its length ranges from 8 1/2 to 11 3/4 inches, while its weight varies from 2 to 5 ounces. The chipmunk's fur is usually reddish brown with a contrasting white belly, and it has a bushy brown tail edged with black markings. Its most noticeable feature is the dark stripe which runs down the center of its back, from the shoulder to the rump. On each side of this stripe are white stripes bordered in black.

The characteristic "chipmunk face" is made up of predominant ears, white stripes above and below the eyes and large internal cheek pouches. The chipmunk has 20 teeth, including a set of chisel-shaped incisors for gnawing its food. Food can be held and eaten sitting upright due to the presence of four clawed toes and a thumb on each front foot.

DISTRIBUTION

The chipmunk ranges throughout most of the eastern United States. However, it is absent from Florida and much of the southeastern coastal plain. It is found from southeastern Canada, west to North Dakota and east to Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska. The Eastern chipmunk is seen in Georgia primarily in the Piedmont and northern regions of the state. They are occasionally found in the upper Coastal Plain along the western edge of the state.

NATURAL HISTORY

Chipmunks are burrowing rodents that reside in open hardwood forests, brushy areas and rocky outcrops. They tend to prefer habitat at the edge of fields and forests where they can gather nuts and seeds from the woodlands and fruits from open areas. They are commonly found around stone walls, woodpiles and old sheds. These squirrel-like rodents are also often seen in trees but do not jump from limb to limb like the common gray squirrel.

Chipmunks are solitary creatures that live in underground burrows. Each burrow is an intricate web of interconnecting tunnels and chambers measuring up to 30 feet, in total length, but inhabited by only one chipmunk most of the year. From the entrance, the burrow descends for about four inches at

a 45 degree angle before branching into a network of tunnels, which usually includes a leaf-lined nesting chamber about the size of a football, and one or more food storage areas.

The home range of an adult male chipmunk may include as much as one acre, but averages around half an acre. The female's range covers only half that of the male's and juveniles usually inhabit no more than one-fifth of an acre. Depending on food availability, home ranges may change size and overlap those of other chipmunks causing population densities to climb as high as 30 per acre. Chipmunks primarily remain solitary except during the mating season or when the female is caring for her young. During these times, chipmunks display territorial behavior, and encounters with other chipmunks will provoke aggressive activity but little physical contact.

A wide variety of voices and calls, including chirps, chucks, trills, whistles, warbles and chatters are characteristic of the chipmunk. They will even "sing" in chorus for a few days during the spring to warn young chipmunks away from already claimed territories.

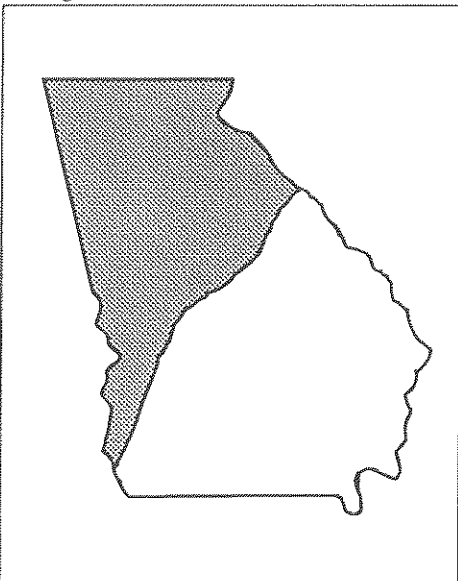
Nuts make up a large part of chipmunk's diet. However, they will feed on insects, grubs, eggs, mushrooms and various fruits, as well. They require little water because they obtain necessary moisture from the foods they eat. Much of the

food a chipmunk gathers is not eaten right away, but stored in its burrow. In just three days, a chipmunk can store as much as one bushel of nuts and seeds. The food is transported in the animal's cheek pouches, which hold as much as two tablespoons. This ability to carry food saves time and shortens exposure to predators, which include long-tailed weasels, hawks, foxes, bobcats, snakes and, in urban settings, domestic cats and dogs.

Although some chipmunks in the south will remain quite active throughout the winter, most become dormant for periods of a few days to a week, or even a few months. During this winter sleep, respiration drops from 60 to about 20 per minute and body temperature decreases from a normal 101 degrees to 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Chipmunks do not gain extensive amounts of body fat during their slumber like true hibernators. They depend on their underground supplies of food for periodic winter-time snacks.

The Eastern chipmunk spends a great deal of time grooming and, because of this, harbors very few external parasites. Grooming also helps the chipmunk remain healthy and attain an average life span of three years. Captive specimens, on the other hand, have survived as long as 12 years.

Chipmunks are concentrated in the Piedmont and northern areas of Georgia, although they can occasionally be found throughout the state.



LIFE CYCLE

At the beginning of the chipmunks' mating season, in late March or early April, males emerge from their burrows seeking females who will not emerge for approximately another two weeks. During these two weeks, there is considerable conflict among males for dominance. Elaborate courtship rituals will occur when only one male is present. Otherwise, courtship is limited or nonexistent.

After the chipmunks have mated and the 31 day gestation period is complete, three to five hairless, blind and helpless young are born sometime in late April or May. There may also be a second litter born in late July or early August, which allows one female to produce as many as 10 young per year. In a few weeks, the young that were born weighing one-tenth of an ounce will be about two-thirds grown and will begin to venture from their burrow. They seldom stray more than 18 inches during the first few days, and when they stray further, the mother will quickly chase them back to the safety of the burrow. About two months after birth, however, the young chipmunks will disperse, and from this time on, the mother will chase them away from the burrow and not let them back in. The young reach sexual maturity at about three months and will sometimes breed during their first summer.

MANAGEMENT

Chipmunks can be attracted to any area within their range by providing the right habitat and proper food. Rock walls with spaces be-

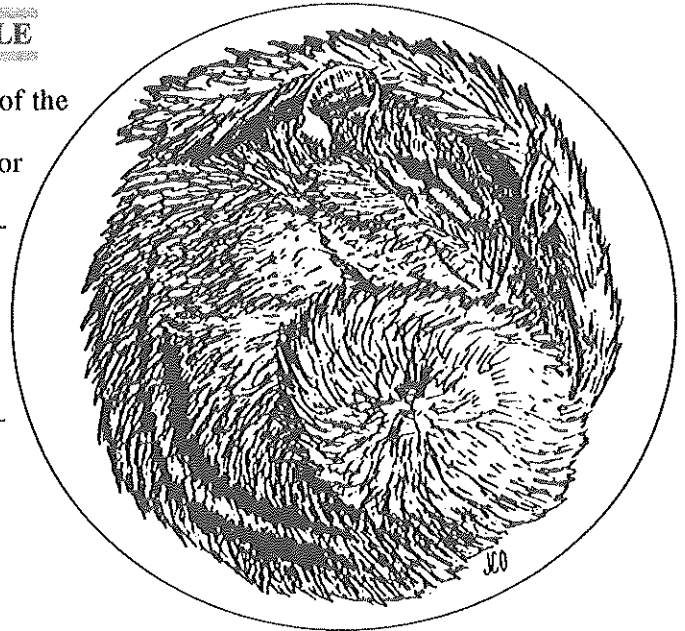


Illustration by Jim Ozier

A hibernating chipmunk can slow down its body functions in order to conserve body heat and energy.

tween the stones, ground cover, low shrubs, trees that bear fruit or nuts and tray feeders filled with corn, sunflower seeds and peanuts all help provide adequate food and cover and a habitat that chipmunks will find appealing.

If chipmunks are a problem and need to be controlled, the easiest solution is to get a dog or cat. When disturbed in this manner, chipmunks will move rather than deal with the harassment from your pets.

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