

# LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

## Humane, Effective Solutions to Human-Wildlife Conflicts

A Program of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



### Chipmunks

*In cities, suburbs, and small towns across Massachusetts, people are noticing a change in their neighborhoods. Some think it's good. Some think it's bad. But everybody seems to be talking about it: more wild animals are making their homes in and around people's yards and houses, in parks and playgrounds, in business developments, even right on Main Street.*

*Chipmunks rarely cause extensive damage to yards and homes, and the enjoyment they provide to homeowners often outweighs any damage they can cause.*

#### General Information

Chipmunks are smaller members of the same family of animals as tree squirrels. However, chipmunks are distinguishable by the broad stripes along their backs.

Eastern chipmunks have reddish-brown fur on their upper parts with five dark brown stripes and contrasting light brown stripes along their backs. They have a tawny stripe that goes from their whiskers to below their ears and light stripes over their eyes. They have a light underside and a dark tail.

Eastern chipmunks mate in early spring and again in early summer, producing litters of four or five young twice each year. The young emerge from the burrow after about six weeks and strike out on their own within the next two weeks.

Chipmunks primarily consume plant matter, and their diet varies with the seasons. They typically eat and store acorns and other nuts underground, which provide them caches of food for the winter. Spring flowers and growing buds are also eaten as the weather warms, and in the summer chipmunks often eat fruits and berries.

Chipmunks fulfill several important functions in our ecosystem. Their activities of harvesting and hoarding tree seeds play a crucial role in seedling establishment, and they consume many different kinds of fungi.

Although they are good climbers, chipmunks prefer to live in burrows they often dig below tree stumps, fallen logs, woodpiles, retaining walls, and rock piles. Chipmunk burrows are 2 inches in diameter, plunge steeply downward, and have loose dirt around the entrance. Chipmunks will also construct extensive tunnel systems underground, often with several entrances, where they store their food.

#### Possible Conflicts and Solutions

Chipmunks are known to dig in lawns, eat ornamental plants and bulbs, and steal food from bird feeders. During the winter months, it is important to remember that chipmunks are only doing what is

natural to them to find food during an often limited and sparse time of the year. Tolerance is especially important if at all possible during this time of year.

Bulbs can be protected by soaking them in certain repellents before planting, or by planting them below 1 x 1 inch wire or plastic screening. Spraying repellents on ornamental plants can help deter inquisitive chipmunks. Humane repellants can be found on-line and at most gardening stores.

Wrapping ripening fruit trees with netting and using various squirrel-proof bird feeders can also keep them away. Sprinklers triggered by motion detectors that are sensitive enough to detect small animals can also discourage chipmunks from investigating gardens. Most gardening and hardware stores sell netting, squirrel-proof bird feeders and motion sensitive sprinkler attachments.

#### Public Health Concerns

Chipmunks are generally not a significant source of infectious disease transmittable to humans.

**For more information about humanely solving human-wildlife conflicts or about the MSPCA's Living With Wildlife program, call (617) 522-7400, visit [www.LivingWithWildlife.org](http://www.LivingWithWildlife.org) or e-mail [LivingWithWildlife@mspca.org](mailto:LivingWithWildlife@mspca.org).**