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FAST FACTS

NAME: Eastern chipmunk

SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Tamias striatus*

AVERAGE WEIGHT: 130 g

AVERAGE LENGTH: 20-30 cm, about one third of which is tail

LIFESPAN: Often less than 1 year, but can reach 5 years

DID YOU KNOW? Chipmunks may have to dig through a metre of snow to leave their burrows in spring.

PHYSIOLOGY

The Eastern chipmunk looks a lot like a small, striped, reddish-brown squirrel with a white belly. Some squirrels do have stripes, but chipmunks have five dark stripes and several white ones, some of which stretch onto the head. Male and female chipmunks look alike.

These rodents' front feet have four toes. The back ones have five.

Chipmunk cheek pouches are made of stretchy skin so the animal can stuff them with food – an handy way to carry lots of goodies off to its burrow. The pouches get larger as the chipmunk gets older.

HABITAT/BEHAVIOUR

Eastern chipmunks are at home in forests where there are plenty of hiding spots, such as under rocks or in fallen trees. This cover helps the critter escape its predators.

These animals will eat fruits, nuts, seeds and mushrooms – sometimes even bird eggs and earthworms.

Each chipmunk builds a burrow where it may live for up to several years. Chipmunks mostly stay away from each other's homes. Its tiny burrow is also a place to hide from predators.

To make its burrow, the chipmunk digs a tunnel and fills the space with fluffy seeds, leaves and grasses. Underneath this bedding, it hides nuts and seeds for winter. That can help the nuts and seeds it does not eat grow into plants.

During winter, chipmunks mostly stay in their burrows. They wake up every few days or weeks to snack from their stored food. That means they don't hibernate.

In spring or summer, a female chipmunk gives birth to an average of three to five babies, which have no fur, are blind and weigh only about three grams! They will venture out of the burrow after about six weeks.

RANGE

The Eastern chipmunk is common in southeastern Canada and the northeastern United States. They reach as far north as the treeline, where it is too cold and dark for forests to grow.

Each critter also has its own range. When in another's territory, a chipmunk will be wary. Chipmunks don't always get along when vying for the nuts humans are passing out!