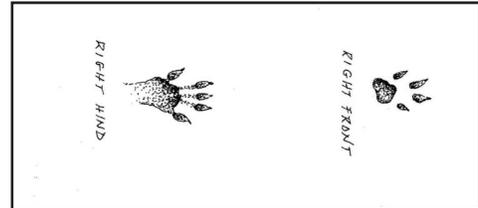
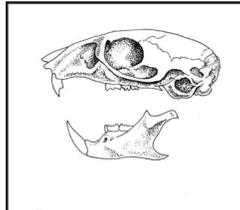
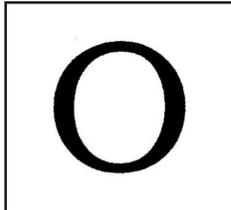
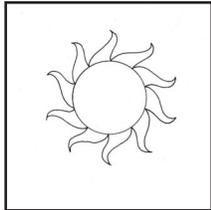




# Eastern Chipmunk

Family Sciuridae

*Tamias striatus*



**The Eastern Chipmunk** is one of Pennsylvania's best known mammals, is closely related to the squirrels and a member of the squirrel family - Sciuridae. Chipmunks are common throughout the state. Common enough to be known by numerous nicknames such as griny, chippie, hackle or rock squirrel.

Their scientific name describes both their behavior and their most-pronounced physical feature. "Tamias" means collector or keeper of provisions and "striatus" refers to their prominent body stripes. Chipmunks sometimes look like they have puffy cheeks filled with food. And they do. **They have pouches on the inside of their cheeks**, which are used for carrying food or even soil they have dug out of burrows. Running along their back and sides are alternating dark and cream stripes. Stripes outline each eye too. Adults are about 10 inches long, including a four-inch furred tail. Both male & female are the color and weight - about two ounces.

**Chipmunks are diurnal**, especially active in early morning and late afternoon. But in hot weather chipmunks will go underground to cool off. **This mid-summer rest is called estivation.** Chipmunks are active in winter, but how active is up for debate. Some research says most chipmunks become torpid or inactive for for at least part of the winter, while other data suggests that merely a third became torpid.



**Admit it. They're cute.** With a small round head, prominent black eyes, tiny ears and short legs, chipmunks are as welcome a sight in backyards as they are popular as cartoon and movie characters.



**Chipmunks are graceful & quick** - darting into underground burrows when startled. Their **short, bushy tails held straight up when they run and whistle sharply when frightened.** Although they are terrestrial, they will sometimes climb trees. They can hear and see quiet well and characteristically sit upright while eating or to survey their surroundings.

Their broad, chisel-shaped incisors are typical of rodents but are considered **omnivores**, eating just about any kind of vegetation as well as feeding on small mammals, birds or their eggs earthworms, snails, even small reptiles or amphibians. **Each hind foot has five clawed toes; each forefoot has four clawed toes and a fifth, thumb-like digit.**

**Chipmunks inhabit** a variety of natural areas. Deciduous forest or parkland with an abundance of fallen logs and tree stumps provide both food and hiding sights. They will also take up residence in hedgerows, rock piles and around houses, outbuildings and gardens.

**Chipmunks use burrows** for nesting, resting and food storage. The burrow is created when the chipmunk pushing dirt away from the entrance or carrying dirt away in their cheek pouches and depositing it away from the burrow. The two-inch wide entrance is usually hidden under a rock or tree stump or something similar. The burrow drops straight down for several inches before leveling into tunnels that could be 30 feet in length. There may be several entrances.

**A nest made of dry leaves and grasses** takes up about a one-foot-square. Nuts, seeds and assorted foods may be stored under the leaf bed or in a storage chamber nearby. **Breeding season begins in late March** with one to eight young born in April or May. The female may bear another litter in mid-to-late summer. The young are blind and furless but within a week their body stripes are visible. At two months of age the chipmunks begin foraging outside the nest with their mother, though they are still not full-grown.

**By fall chipmunks gather food for the winter**, storing it in their burrows or above-ground caches in their home territories. Because **they are not true hibernators**, chipmunks do not put on a layer of extra body fat for winter like a groundhog might. But by late October or early November, they will begin to stay underground occasionally, living on stored food until spring.

**When chipmunks do go underground to sleep, they plug their den entrances behind them.** No matter the length of sleep, they still wake periodically throughout the winter to eat. On sunny days with milder temperatures they may leave the den briefly. Some chipmunks even emerge to breed in late February or early March, until snow or cold drives them back underground into dormancy.



## A Simple Review of Chipmunks



You know them. Cute, spunky. Easy to identify with a **rusty brown coat and white underbelly, stripes on the sides, back and alongside each bright eye**. They live in forests, brushy areas, gardens, rock piles, fencerows and building foundations.

**The eastern chipmunk eats mostly seeds, nuts and fruits of woody plants** (acorns from oak trees, samaras from maple trees and all sorts of berries). Chipmunks will also eat insects, bird eggs, snails, even small reptiles like snakes.

**They spend most of their time in underground burrows** of varying size and design. Most have several chambers for storage, sleeping and a bathroom. Each burrow have several entrances and exits to ensure escapes from predators from above the ground, such as a hawk or predators within the burrow, like a snake.



Burrows also have a chamber for caching the **food that chipmunks have carried back to their nest inside of their cheek pouches.** That's where the phrase "chipmunk cheeks" comes from!

**Female chipmunks have a litter of four or five young** in spring and sometimes again in the middle of summer. The babies are born hairless, blind and helpless. But in just a week their stripes are visible in their new coat.

**Chipmunks are diurnal** or active during the day unless it's really hot. In high temperatures they will go underground during the day to cool down in the shade of their burrows.

If you ever find **piles of leftover pieces of nut shells or fruit pulp on the ground,** that is probably a sign of an active chipmunk nearby.

**During winter chipmunks may sleep for weeks at a time, but they don't truly hibernate.** When they are ready to sleep they will stuff leaves or other debris into their burrow entrances to plug them up. Inside the warmth of their home they will go into a deep sleep, curled up in a ball, in a state called a winter torpor. But during this time chipmunks will wake up and eat from their stored cache of food and may even go outside briefly.

